

Migraine headaches are no fun.

I used to have them. I'd get really irritable and crave sugar and chocolate. My vision would change. Light became painful. Every noise was magnified. I felt like I was going to puke. Finally, half of my head would throb. I'd end my day falling asleep in a dark room.

Luckily, an integrative medicine approach was effective for me in eliminating my migraine problem.

Migraines affect 28 million Americans. Most migraine sufferers are women. Western science doesn't have any great explanations for migraine causes. We know that migraines can be related to hormonal factors, abnormal neurotransmitter function, hyperexcitable neurons, certain foods, and stress.

Women are more likely to have migraines just before or during their periods. Menstruation is triggered by a sudden drop in progesterone. A high estrogen to progesterone ratio is most likely responsible for hormonally induced migraines. For some women, chasteberry helps rebalance estrogen and progesterone. Other women may need more thorough rebalancing of their hormones. Those women who take birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy, or dopamine related drugs should not take chasteberry.

Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers in the body. Levels of some of them, serotonin and melatonin, drop during migraines. This neurotransmitter is also involved in mood, digestion, and pain. Because of the wide variety of uses our bodies have for serotonin, imbalance can lead to anxiety, depression, nausea, irritable bowel, and even fibromyalgia. During migraines, the drop in serotonin leads to inflammation of the cranial nerves, especially the trigeminal nerve. Craniosacral Therapy or Cranial Osteopathy can be effective for improving trigeminal nerve function. For those migraine sufferers who don't take serotonin regulating drugs, 5-HTP or idebenone may be used to increase serotonin levels. Melatonin is available as an over-the-counter sleep aid.

A proper balance of calcium and magnesium is necessary for proper functioning of the nerves that control blood vessels. Taking magnesium helps prevent nerves from misfiring or becoming overly excited by calcium and thereby causing fluctuations in blood vessel size. Taking 400mg of magnesium at bedtime was the first supplement that successfully reduced migraine frequency for me. If you already have a headache, try putting your hands in ice cold water to drop your body temperature and cause your overly dilated blood vessels to constrict.

Recognizing my triggers was another milestone. Certain foods increase migraines. The worst offenders are aspartame or Nutrisweet®, monosodium glutamate, soy, alcohol, aged cheeses, chocolate, caffeine, fermented and pickled foods. Skipping meals also increases migraines. Keep your blood sugar stable by eating something with protein at least every 3 hours. A handful of walnuts is an ideal snack because the tryptophan content increases serotonin. Keep a food log. Foods may trigger migraines for up to 3 days after they are eaten.

Physical and mental stressors can increase migraine frequency and severity. Exercising excessively, failing to get enough sleep, weather changes, and experiencing emotional trauma can all be problematic. Relaxation techniques, cognitive-behavioral therapy, Hakomi method body centered psychotherapy, biofeedback, aromatherapy and hypnosis can all reduce stress triggers.

Unfortunately, withdrawal from triptan migraine medications can trigger rebound headaches. Butterbur 50-100mg and Riboflavin 400mg both have clinical studies showing they help with migraines. Along with magnesium, they form the basis of a nutritional supplement approach to preventing headaches. Other supplements or acupuncture may be needed for some migraine sufferers.

Research all suggestions yourself and discuss them with your health care professionals before starting your migraine prevention program.

Seth McLaughlin is licensed as a massage therapist, certified as a nutritional consultant, certified as a pharmacy technician. He has worked as an herbalist, aromatherapist, and pharmaceutical compounder in an integrated medicine pharmacy, Mac's Medicine Mart, since 1995. He is also one of the authors of *Complementary and Alternative Medicine Secrets*, edited by Wendy Kohatsu, MD. Seth owns Essential Therapies in Kingsport and Johnson City. To contact Seth about this article or becoming healthy, check out www.e-therapies.net or call (423) 392-4325.

This copyright for this article is owned by Seth McLaughlin. You may reprint this article in electronic format as long as you print it in its entirety. All reprints must contain the full biographical statement and this copyright information For printing this article in paper format, obtained expressed written consent.