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## The Complete Guide to Migraine Headaches

PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND REMEDIES

By Alice Peart

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## Part-I: Introduction

### 1. Migraine headaches - An Overview

Migraine headaches are severe headaches which can happen suddenly. They have distinct symptoms, such as tingling in the leg (or arm) or blind spots or flashes of light across your eyes.

You then become very sensitive to light, which is called Photophobia, and sound, which is called Phonophobia. You also feel nauseated or actually vomit.

Migraine headaches may prevail for few hours or few days. The pain is intense.

Migraine headaches are a common ailment among more than 28 million Americans. Another interesting statistic is more women suffer from migraines than men do. 8% of men and 25% of women suffer from a migraine at some or other time of their lives.

A migraine is a vascular headache as it is due to compression of arteries and their effects on veins. You may feel pain either on one side of the head or all over your head.

'Migraine' comes from the Greek word, hemikranion, which means pain affecting one side of the head.

#### What Causes a Migraine?

There is no single cause for a migraine. Contributing factors could include:

intake of alcohol

certain specific food items

the menstrual cycle in women

weather changes

bright light, and

some genetic factors.

A migraine could lead to certain psychological problems, strokes and depression. This is because of the narrowing of the blood vessels in the brain and head which lowers the flow of blood to the brain and results in intense headaches and pain.

### ***Time for a Migraine***

Migraine headaches commonly occur between the ages of ten and forty-six. Inherited genetic factors causing a migraine are due to skeletal imbalances. Normally, your doctor conducts a detailed investigation into your family history to analyze possible causes of your migraine.

Those suffering from sinus problems also suffer from severe headaches, albeit different from a migraine. A thorough examination by a neurologist with an MRI and a CT scan can clear all doubts of your headache being due to sinus, brain tumor, or seizures.

### **Combating a Migraine**

The main aim of any migraine treatment is to lessen and eliminate the pain. This should also reduce the vomiting and nausea symptoms. Doctors recommend an array of treatment methods and intake of various NSAIDs like Tylenol, Advil, or Excedrin or other drugs like Topamax, Imitrex and some others.

However, none of these drugs can provide long-term relief from migraine headaches.

A migraine is a neurological disease. There are many new medications available. Although they may not offer a total relief, they can reduce the frequency of occurrence of a migraine. Again, they can stop the pain sooner after your migraine headache starts.

### ***The Mechanism Behind A Migraine***

Migraine headaches come from excessive pressure on the temporalis muscle and trigeminal nerve. These are the primary centers for the cause of your migraine

headache. It results due to excessive and abnormal muscular activity leading to a change in the blood flow and electrochemistry within your head. Normally, you associate headaches or an attack of a migraine to a very stressful day.

Normal headaches find relief in simple medications. However, migraine sufferers do not find any relief from such medications.

Various dental problems are often the cause for your migraine. Crooked teeth and disjoined jaws lead to excessive clenching and grinding. Abnormal functioning of these muscles triggers abnormal blood flow. Lack of sufficient blood supply causes headaches which persist.

Such intense contraction of muscles leads to chronic headaches. The pain is more intense due to overuse and overexertion of muscles. Eventually, it can lead to joint damage. Then, your muscles try to increase activity to make up for the damage, leading to more pain.

This vicious cycle continues and you suffer from a migraine.

### ***Stress on the Muscles***

Muscular stress causes migraines. Normally, you do not compress or grind your teeth. However, in stressful situations, you clench your teeth together hard. Even a slight touch of the teeth needs excellent coordination between the temporalis and masseter muscles. Coordinated contraction of these muscles helps you put your teeth together comfortably.

However, continued contraction of these muscles leads to muscular dysfunction. You may suffer from this dysfunction but may not notice until the resultant problem crops up later in life.

This is because of the wear and tear of the joint with age and time. As the jaw and muscles lose their ability to function, surrounding muscular tissue also go into a dysfunctional mode. This triggers your migraine headache.

This constant tension of the jaw and associated nerves damage the health and working of the associated nerves. Facial nerves bear the brunt of the problem leading to cramps, nausea, and oversensitivity to light and sound. It could also lead to spasms, lack of deep sleep, and other neurological problems. You may feel as if your body is burning.

These symptoms are due to accelerated working of the sympathetic nervous system of your body. They cannot maintain the balance in your body. Efficient and coordinated functioning of all body parts suffer, which causes pain in all the muscles of the body.

Because of this, you feel tired, irritated, angry, and depressed. It takes a lot of time for the hyper-activated sympathetic nervous system to regain its balance and resume normal functioning. Migraine headache treatments try to bring it into balance sooner and thus relieve you of your migraine headache.

## Part-II: Understanding migraine headaches

### 2. What are migraine headaches?

A migraine is a neurological disease and a type of vascular headache. A migraine occurs due to changes in the vascular body system and also affects the muscular tissues too. The main characteristics of migraine headaches are severe pain on either one side or both sides of the head, extreme sensitivity to light and sound, nausea, vomiting and an upset stomach.

There are many different types of headaches. Each could cause severe pain and discomfort. Therefore, only a careful and correct diagnosis of the symptoms can classify your headache in the migraine category or not. Such clear classification helps in prescribing proper treatment and better relief from the pain.

#### What Happens During Migraine Headaches?

If you have a bout of migraine, you can feel severe pain in either one or both sides of your head and, additionally, around the temples or behind an ear or eye.

Normally, a migraine attack starts in the morning but it can occur at other times of the day. The pain can last for a few hours to many days. You can become very sensitive to light and sound. You also can suffer from nausea, vomiting and an upset stomach - or all three at once.

#### Causes of a Migraine

You cannot allocate any single reason for the cause for your migraine headache. Such attacks could be due to excessive noise or very bright lights, lack of sufficient sleep or food, anxiety, stress, environmental changes, or intake of alcohol, and nicotine, certain foods like chocolate or others foods containing additives. Women also suffer migraine bouts due to hormonal changes during their menstrual cycles.

There are two main forms of a migraine - classic and common migraine. However, it is helpful to keep a headache diary and note down the time, where

you were when it began and what you were doing when your migraine started. This could prove helpful to your doctor to analyze the type of your migraine so your doctor can suggest suitable medications.

### 3. Types of Migraine Headaches

There are many different types of migraine headaches. All these headaches have the same basic migraine features with some differences in their symptoms, intensity, and occurrence.

A migraine is a slow starter but soon becomes a steady and nagging pain. The intensity increases with time. You feel a throbbing and reverberating pain at the temples, near your eyes and ears. All types of migraines cause nausea, vomiting, and extreme sensitivity to light and sound.

#### ***Classification of a Migraine***

**There are two broad classifications of a migraine:**

1. A migraine with aura, which is a **classic migraine** and
2. A migraine without aura, which is a **common migraine**

#### ***A Migraine with Aura***

With these, you experience an aura or certain indicators that may point towards the coming onslaught of the headache. Those indicators occur due to the combination of different neurological symptoms before the particular migraine. You could see flashing lights, have blind spots in an eye or both the eyes, view wavy and jagged lines, experience certain hallucinations, disturbances in your hearing, or even feel strange odors and a change your senses of taste and smell.

You may become numb to feelings of touch and go blank, without able to recollect the correct words you are about to speak. These neurological events can occur around an hour before the start of the migraine headaches and go away once the migraine pain starts.

## ***Types of Migraines with Aura***

**Hemiplegics migraine:** This is a rare but severe type of migraine. It is normally hereditary. It starts with a temporary paralysis, or similar sensory disturbances on one side of the body, and develops into severe headache within an hour.

However, your paralysis and other neurological disturbances vanish with the arrival of your headache.

**Ophthalmoplegic migraine:** This severe, and rare, migraine causes pain around the eyeball with paralysis of the surrounding muscles. The symptoms last for a few days or months. However, immediate medical attention is necessary to relieve pressure on the nerves surrounding the eye.

**Retinal migraine:** This migraine is very rare and begins with a temporary and partial or complete loss of sight in an eye. Your eye aches and the pain spreads to other parts of the head too.

**Basilar Artery migraine:** This rare form of a migraine may come in bouts. You experience confusion, dizziness, ringing in the ears, vomiting or speaking problems. This migraine occurs due to hormonal imbalances and is common with young women and girls.

**Abdominal migraine:** This migraine pain attacks your abdominal region. You experience vomiting, nausea, and diarrhea. Pain and associated symptoms occur for many hours.

## ***Migraines without an Aura***

This is a vascular headache and occurs due to the constriction of blood vessels in and around the skull. Migraine pain is due to inflammation of blood vessels. There could be two or more such headaches every month, though it varies from person to person. Some last for few days while some last for a few hours. Such headaches can start at any time of the day or night but they do not wake you from your sleep.

## 4. What is A Migraine?

A chronic migraine is a migraine that occurs for a fortnight or more every month. It does not occur due to an overdose of medications or painkillers and discontinuance of a medication won't lessen it. It may be due to changes in parts of your brain but there is no clear medical research to support this theory.

### Diagnosis of a Migraine

Doctors conduct thorough physical and neurological examinations and review your medical history and background. Some headaches could be due to certain irregularities in your skull or brain. Imaging techniques like MRI and CT scans can reveal these abnormalities. But, if there are no revelations in your scans and you still suffer from severe headaches, doctors may diagnose a migraine.

### Causes

A migraine can start and end at any time. There can be a total cessation of the headache altogether too. You cannot pinpoint any particular cause for your migraine. Doctors advise you to maintain a regular chronological journal of your lifestyle patterns, food intake, and other activities to show up possible causes.

#### A few possible causes are:

- Irregular and insufficient sleep patterns
- Strong perfumes, air fresheners or incense sticks
- Insufficient intake of healthy food
- Long and stressful driving
- Prolonged viewing of television or exposure to computers
- Excessive stress
- Alcoholic beverages

- Not enough water

If you are able to link any of these causes with your migraine, take remedial steps to alter your lifestyle patterns and get relief from this terrible and excruciating pain.

## ***Accompanying Symptoms***

A migraine causes severe head pain. Nausea and vomiting accompany it. It becomes difficult, or even impossible, to bear the slightest sound or light. You feel the pain passing through your entire body and almost destabilizing your virtual existence. In short, a migraine seems like physical torture.

## **Remedies**

Doctors prescribe certain anti-seizure medications, antidepressants or cardiovascular drugs as medications for different people's migraines. However, none of those offer total relief for your migraine.

You can choose from a wide choice of medications, natural remedies, pain management techniques, therapies and other methods of relief. However, migraine intensity differs from person to person and the effectiveness of the remedies also differs.

There is no permanent and sure relief for a migraine. Nevertheless, you may be able to control the onset, frequency and occurrence of some migraines.

- Reduce your stress levels at your workplace and home
- Develop a certain relaxing regimen, according to your tastes.
- Opt for soothing background music, meditation, relaxed bath, yoga, or
- Set aside a quiet place for you alone.

These techniques relax your nervous system and may keep a migraine at bay.

## 5. Signs and Symptoms of Typical Migraine headaches

A migraine is a vascular headache and a neurological disease. Migraine attacks are not the same for all people. A typical migraine headache may last for four to seventy-two hours. Some suffer migraine attacks many times a month while some suffer only twice in a year.

**Common signs and symptoms of typical migraine headaches are:**

- Pulsating and throbbing pain in the head
- Pain on either one or both sides of the head
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sensitivity to light (Photophobia)
- Sensitivity to sound (Phonophobia)
- Increasing pain with physical exertion
- Headache intensifies with head movements and
- Splitting headache which discourages normal functioning

Migraine headaches can be either a migraine with aura or a migraine without aura. A migraine without aura is the common migraine and those with aura are the classic migraines.

If you suffer from classic migraines, you experience additional symptoms which can occur maybe half an hour before the onset of migraine headaches.

**A few such symptoms are:**

- Sudden appearance of shiny and zigzag lines in your line of vision
- Flashes of light across your vision

- Tingling and prickly sensations in your hands and legs
- Spreading blindness in the area of vision
- Inability to express yourself with words

Some of these symptoms may or may not subside after the start of the migraine headache. The pain progresses by moving from one side to encompass the whole head or it could also alternate between the two sides.

In very rare cases, migraines occur with seizures. This is a complicated type of a migraine and normally the effects wear off fairly soon. **Hemiplegic migraines** can cause temporary one-sided paralysis. The **Basilar** type of migraine affects basic physical motor skills and affects your body movements too.

You will seek a dark and cool room or feel like covering your eyes with a dark cool cloth.

## Warning Signs

Irrespective of the type of migraine, your body sends out certain specific warning signs about the impending onslaught of pain. Such warning signals appear from a day before to a few hours before the actual migraine.

Such warning signs include:

- Excessive thirst
- Drowsiness and sleepiness
- Irritability and Depression
- Unusual craving for sweets
- Very energetic and elated

These preludes could prepare you for few hours or days of intense suffering. Sometimes, warning signs are different and do not affect any of your five senses.

Instead, you develop a vague feeling and a premonition that not everything is well; there is something irregular or untoward. You could slowly develop problems in forming proper sentences.

Migraines commonly do not affect infants and young children. However, it can surface in infants in exceptional cases. The intensity and occurrence of such headaches become less as you grow.

**The signs and symptoms of a typical migraine headache in children are:**

- Sleepiness or listlessness
- Yawning
- Craving for hot-dogs, bananas, yogurt, chocolate and sugary snacks
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sensitivity to light and sound
- Severe headache on both sides of the head

Occurrence of visual auras in children is very rare. In certain cases, there may be the presence of symptoms without any headache at all. This is an abdominal migraine. Diagnosis of such a migraine is difficult.

Migraines in children tend to be of short duration, but they could cause your child to miss some school days.

## 6. Factors That Trigger Migraine Headaches

Migraine headaches may occur suddenly at any time. There may be something which triggers a migraine attack.

Such triggers could be any dietary, environmental, behavioral, infectious, hormonal or chemical factors. Presence of such factors may set off migraine headaches.

However, migraine attacks may occur without any apparent reasons too.

Doctors often advise migraine patients to maintain a regular journal or diary. You could note down the specific time of occurrence of migraine headaches such as frequency, duration, your food intake before an attack and other factors like stress, emotional outbursts, or anxiousness, and similar other plausible reasons or causes for your migraine attack.

A look through the diary could help you, or your doctor to zero in on common factors normally occurring before every migraine attack. They could then be described as your trigger factors.

Trigger factors differ from person to person as intensity and frequency of occurrence of migraine attacks also differ from person to person.

### **Nevertheless, a few common triggers are:**

- Tiredness and exhaustion
- Stress from physical and environmental factors
- Over-illumination or glare
- Missing meals or fasting
- Excessive or lack of Sleep
- Changes in atmospheric pressure

- Changes in altitude
- Loud unusual noises and strong smells and scents
- Intense physical activity, including sexual activity
- Hormonal changes
- Birth control pills
- Menstrual cycles
- Alcoholic beverages
- Chocolate
- Excess of caffeine
- Specific medications or food items affecting diameter of the blood vessels
- Specific foods containing additives
- Allergic food items

Doctors and researchers assert that the effect of dietary factors is more often subjective. Some dietary components precipitate a migraine attack while some others play no role at all.

**Some foods which may be linked to migraines are:**

- Hot dogs and pizza as they contain processed meat, fish, and nitrates
- Aged cheese, bread and crackers containing cheese
- Sourdough bread
- Chicken livers
- Alcoholic beverages like red wine

- Dark chocolate
- Citrus fruits
- Aspartame (artificial sweetener)
- Caffeine
- Monosodium glutamate - This is an additive with natural and artificial forms, that is commonly present in canned foods, Chinese food, seasonings (like soy sauce) and tenderizers.
- Pickled foods
- Brewer's yeast, including fresh yeast, coffee cake, doughnuts
- Certain dairy products like buttermilk and sour cream
- Excess of onions
- Certain fruits like papaya and passion-fruit
- Preserved or marinated foods like olives
- Some snack foods
- Peanuts
- Broad beans, peas, lentils

Doctors normally advise you to stay away from such trigger foods and factors for a considerable time. You can then try to eat these foods after a gap of a month or more to help you better understand the extent and effect of such trigger factors. You cannot ascribe any single factor as the apparent reason for such a trigger. It could be combination of several factors.

However, dietary restrictions do not in any way reduce or eliminate a migraine attack. You can probably reduce the intensity. Nevertheless, the major triggers

are missing meals, excessive caffeine and intake of alcohol. The best option to lessen the impact and frequency of migraine attacks is to moderate your body functions. Follow a regular pattern of exercise, have timely meals with adequate rest and try to lead a stress free life.

## 7. What is the Real Cause of Migraine Headaches?

There are no clear medical reports to pinpoint any particular cause for migraine headaches. However, the majority opinion favors changes in blood flow to the brain. Normally, migraine patients have very sensitive blood vessels.

### How Does it Happen?

Any stressful event affects your brain. This occurs mainly due to the concentration of innumerable nerves in the arteries at the base of the brain. Stress causes seizure or contraction of most of these nerves. This, in turn, affects the functioning of the arteries carrying blood to the brain. Therefore, your scalp and arteries of your neck suffer from reduced blood supply.

So, your brain also receives less blood. The brain immediately senses some danger, and that leads to the formation of blood clotting platelets. Serotonin is a chemical substance released during this process. This substance further restricts the supply of blood to arteries and brain.

Lower blood supply leads to a lesser supply of oxygen to the brain. Lack of oxygen causes unclear vision and/or speech, headache and other symptoms, similar to those of a nervous breakdown.

A cyclic reaction takes place among the other arteries of the body. They widen to carry more blood to the brain. However, such widening releases prostaglandins from different blood cells and tissues. These prostaglandins are pain-causing substances and lead to swelling and inflammation. The widening and resultant inflammation causes the throbbing sensation. This sensation is primarily felt as migraine headaches.

This shows that migraine headaches are primarily a neurological disorder. The first affliction is in the nerves, which triggers a series of reactions and counteractions in other body systems. Hence, you experience certain changes and imbalances before the onset of migraine pain in the head.

Such factors could start up to twenty-four hours before the migraine. Another factor supporting this theory is that the effects of migraine headaches persist even after the headache ceases. You feel a tender and uncomfortable feeling in your head and it takes some time for you to recoup your previous thinking power.

A drop in serotonin levels leads to the release of neuropeptides by the trigeminal nerve. These neuropeptides dilate blood vessels, causing inflammation. Inflamed blood vessels seem to hit across your head; this is the throbbing pain you feel during a migraine attack.

### ***Other Factors***

There are various other migraine headache triggers too, such as the hormonal changes in women during their menstrual cycles. This sets off migraine headaches before or after periods. They sometimes also occur during pregnancy and menopause. Women on birth control pills get more migraines.

Certain food items, additives and vegetable or fruits could also cause sensory changes in your body leading to migraines. Environmental changes, medications, irregular sleep and eating patterns are other major contributors.

## 8. Risk Factors

Estimates say that more than thirty million Americans suffer from migraines.

Approximately 1/3 are male and the rest are female.

Risk factors include anything that induces or increases the chances of affliction of any disease or particular medical condition.

### Major Risk Factors.

**Certain major risk factors for the incidence of a migraine are:**

**Hormonal fluctuations:** Hormones are most active in women between twenty and fifty. Constant fluctuations occur in progesterone and estrogen levels during this period. These changes bring the risk of migraines and may decide their severity too.

Similarly, the premenstrual and postmenstrual time is a risky period for a migraine to occur. Pregnant women experience migraines in the initial stages. Women on birth control pills or hormone replacement therapies have a higher risk of incidence of a migraine, not only during the normal course, but also during pregnancy and menstruation.

**Lack of Sleep or Sleep Apnea:** Irregular and insufficient sleep patterns, insomnia or excessive sleep are all contributing factors.

**Depression:** Anxious thoughts, pessimism and mental disturbances hamper normal functioning of your nervous system and brain. This triggers a chain of reactions in other body systems leading to severe headaches. Such depression also causes grinding and clenching of teeth.

**Arthritis:** Wrong posture can lead to arthritis in the neck muscles. This upsets the regular supply of blood and oxygen to the brain causing migraines.

**Irregular Meals:** Skipping meals, fasting and having food at odd times of the day disrupts body functioning. Your body is unable to receive the necessary

energy for functioning. A lack of sufficient nutrition at proper intervals leads to migraines.

**Specific Food Additives and Nitrates:** Certain foods contain monosodium glutamate (MSG) or nitrates. These may trigger migraine headaches.

**Alcohol:** Red wine is a major cause for a migraine.

**Stress:** Excessive physical stress, including increased sexual activity and mental exhaustion, can trigger migraines.

**Medications:** Certain medications causing dilation of blood vessels can bring the risk of a migraine. Daily use of headache remedies is another major risk factor.

**Hereditary:** Hereditary genes could cause migraines. If either or both parents have migraines, there is every possibility of the offspring developing a migraine at some or other time in their lives. This could be due to certain genetic problems in blood vessel regulation.

**Perfumes and Strong Scents:** These trigger certain involuntary reactions within your body which may pre-dispose you to develop migraines.

**Excessive lights and sound:** Blaring noise and bright lights increase activity of your nerve cells triggering headaches.

**Physical changes in environment:** Higher altitude with marked changes in weather or time zone could lead to upsets in your body systems, triggering migraine headaches.

## 9. Who Gets Migraine Headaches?

Migraine headaches show greater incidence among certain categories of people. The occurrence of a migraine does not follow any specific pattern. Nevertheless, a generalized pattern stems from the frequency of its occurrence. Migraine headaches occur commonly in the following categories:

**Age:** A migraine occurs between the ages of ten and forty. Although the incidence of a migraine decreases after forty, late life migraines may develop in a very few cases; about one percent of the population. Similarly, very young children and infants also suffer from migraines, but the percentage is very low.

**Genetic: Repeat from an earlier reference.** Genes play a major role in your migraine. If either or both parents have migraine problems, there is every possibility for you to develop a pattern of migraines.

**Ethnic Differences:** According to a worldwide study, migraines are most common in North America, with lesser incidences in South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. However, doctors think genetic causes are responsible, and place less importance on environmental factors.

**Gender:** Women are at a higher risk to suffer from a migraine across the world. The percentage remains the same among boys and girls during childhood but the percentage of incidence is much greater in girls after puberty.

**Hormone Fluctuations in Women:** The hormonally-active years of women between adolescence and menopause experience the maximum fluctuations in the hormones; estrogen and progesterone. This triggers a migraine in many women. Similarly, pregnant women, women on contraceptives (or hormone replacement therapies) and menstruating women experience migraines.

**Medical Conditions:** Specific infections like peptic ulcers due to bacteria *H. pylori* and allergies can cause a migraine. Asthmatic patients suffer migraines and could pass it on to their children. Epileptic patients have a greater chance of a migraine as they already suffer from nerve disorders. Fibromyalgia patients

suffer from intense muscular pain and resultant fatigue. Excessive muscular fatigue could also trigger a migraine.

**Personality Traits:** Although a migraine afflicts women more than men, apparently strong-willed and conscientious women do not suffer from the onslaught of a migraine. Weak women with a submissive personality have a higher risk of a migraine.

## 10. Migraine Headaches in Children

Migraines affect children too. It could start from the age of seven or ten. It affects boys and girls equally. However, boys outgrow a migraine in their adolescence while girls experience them with greater frequency and intensity due to hormonal changes.

Children are often unable to express any symptoms of a migraine. Therefore, if headaches occur weekly or occur regularly, it is best to consult a doctor to determine the specific causes. Very young children unable to express migraine headache pain could just hold their heads in their hands and cry. Nevertheless, there is no specific rule or guideline to predict occurrence and presence of a migraine in your child.

### Causes

A migraine in children is predominantly a hereditary feature. There are other contributing factors too, like:

**Excessive noise and light:** Bright light and loud noises, like those of movies on television, could trigger a migraine. Environmental changes and strong odors may also cause a migraine.

**Emotional disturbances:** School problems, peer pressure and parental expectations cause high stress and anxiety levels in children. Depression sets in and leads to sad and lonely feelings and thoughts, sometimes causing a migraine.

**Viral Infections:** Viral infection in any part of the body like nose, urinary tract, or lungs could cause fever and associated headaches. Sometimes, these headaches assume the form of a migraine.

**Brain Tumors and Meningitis:** A brain tumor is a rare occurrence in children. However, migraines occur with increased frequency as the tumor grows. The location of the tumor also decides the severity of a migraine. Meningitis is an

inflammatory condition affecting the nervous system. Pressure on the brain increases and therefore, leads to severe headaches and migraines.

**Common Infections:** Common infections like eye infections, ear infections, and sinus among others trigger headaches. Such headaches could become a regular feature and assume the form of a migraine.

**Head trauma:** Children often suffer accidental bumps on their head. Although such headaches do not persist, headaches can occasionally graduate into frequent instances of a migraine. Such injuries also cause nausea, confusion, vomiting or changes in consciousness or response time.

**Specific foods and beverages:** Specific foods like bologna, bacon and hot dogs contain monosodium glutamate or MSG. This causes headaches in some people. Similarly, certain beverages like chocolate, caffeine, and soda also are believed to sometimes trigger migraines.

**Lack of Sleep:** Insufficient sleep causes overtiredness and may lead to migraines.

**Excessive exposure to sun:** Playing for long hours in hot sun could trigger a migraine.

## Symptoms

Migraines in children could be with or without an aura. Flashing lights, blind spots in vision, wavy lines with disrupted vision may appear before and signal the arrival of a migraine within few hours. Some children experience these indicators with stomach pain before an abdominal migraine.

A migraine without aura is most common among children. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, giddiness, fatigue, mood changes, special cravings for foods and sugary snacks, or a loss of appetite. Your child could develop a fever of 102 to 103 degrees and diarrhea too. Your child could also lose his/her sense of balance.

## ***Preventive Measures***

Assure adequate rest, with eight to ten hours of deep sleep and proper intake of food at correct timings, for your child. Maintain a headache diary with details of their time, frequency, and place of occurrence. Avoid stressors and cultivate a healthy balance in your child's life.

## ***Treatments***

Always consult your doctor and give the prescribed medicines in appropriate dosages to your child. You could help them to develop certain behavioral patterns and changes to lower stress levels and develop a balanced life pattern.

Professional and peer counseling could work fine for curing stress-related migraine problems. Do not take migraine problems in your children lightly.

## 11. Recent Research on Migraine Headaches

The length, severity and frequency of occurrence of a migraine depend on an individual's conditions. These features also differ from attack to attack. You need proper treatment, not only during a migraine attack but also after that, to prevent further attacks or lower impact of future attacks.

Different professional and consumer medical organizations are conducting regular and detailed research into the possible causes, and ways to lower the intensity and occurrence, of a migraine. Healthcare professionals, from across different strata and disciplines, are joining hands to conduct effective research and providing better remedies.

### Recent Research Findings

The National Headache Foundation conducted a ten-year study on the prevalence of migraine headaches in the United States. The report was released at the 13th Annual Conference of the Diamond Headache Clinic Research and Education Foundation on February 22, and contained about 2000 submitted details of studies between 1989 and 1999.

The report clearly indicates that migraine sufferers continue to suffer and bear their severe headaches despite developments in medicine. The major problem, often, is a misdiagnosis of migraine headaches as sinus headaches and administration of relevant medication. Hence, migraine sufferers often do not receive proper treatment and continue to suffer.

### ***Implantable Neurotransmitter***

Many migraine sufferers could well be in sight of a suitable remedy for their migraine headaches. Recently, researchers developed an implantable neurotransmitter. Although these devices are on their clinical trials at this writing, such devices could be of immense help to patients who suffer severe migraines who cannot bear the side-effects of prevalent medications and do not have any favorable response to available therapies.

Boston Scientific has now put up a Precision Implantable Stimulator for migraines (PRISM) on a trial basis. Roger Cady, M.D., Director of Clinvest and the Headache Care Center in Springfield, MO, is upbeat about the possible positive impact of the device on the lives of migraine-affected people that find no respite from their migraine despite using various conventional therapies.

However, presently, a precision neuro stimulation system is in use for treatment of intractable chronic pain of trunk and limbs. Hence, usage for a migraine is still in the early investigation stage.

Loma Linda University's School of Public Health in California conducted a clinical study to find if a **high-complex carbohydrate** diet could provide relief from migraine attacks. The result of such a diet was astounding. More than 94% of the patients reported a 40% decrease in their headaches. Fifty percent of the patients reported total freedom from the debilitating pain. The perceived improvements seemed mostly to be about the intensity, frequency, duration and the need for medication to treat migraines which reduced up to 70%, according to reports.

The Loma Linda University was the first to treat a migraine with changes in a person's lifestyle. Dietary changes reduced blood-fat levels considerably. This helped to restore the necessary biochemical balance in the body. Further research and tests could confirm whether or not this therapy might be confirmed as a method of preventing migraine attacks.

Many television and radio stations, popular magazines like Women's Health Today, Men's Health, Glamour, Allure and others reported the findings of the study. They also carried detailed reports about the specific diets that they reported as providing relief to many migraine sufferers across the world.

## Part-III: Diagnosis of Migraine Headaches

### 12. How to Diagnosis Migraine Headaches

Migraine headaches occur due to a variety of causes. Doctors and physicians follow a set pattern for diagnosis of a migraine. The very first step is to look for hereditary factors. Doctors often advise chronic headache patients to maintain a diary to record the time and specific features of their headache.

**You have to give details of:**

- **Time of occurrence of headache;** both the dates and time of day too
- **Type of pain;** whether it is throbbing, splitting, mild or unbearable
- **Location of the pain;** on one side of the head or all over the head
- **Accompanying symptoms;** nausea, vomiting, giddiness, pain in the muscles
- **Duration of the headache;** an hour, few hours, or few days
- **Frequency of occurrence;** fortnightly, monthly, intermittently, or during specific periods like menstrual cycle
- **Place of occurrence;** indoors or outdoors
- **Proximity to any strong odors or scents**
- **Any specific medications that seemed to provide relief**
- **Any stress related cause;** physical exertion, intense sexual activity or emotional outburst
- **Lack of proper meals or hydration**
- **Environmental factors;** weather or altitude

- **Any physical injuries**
  
- **Any inherent medical disorders**

After collecting all available relevant information, doctors conduct urinalysis and blood chemistry tests. These can expose any underlying medical conditions like infections and thyroid; these conditions often precipitate and trigger a headache.

If migraines run in your family, doctors advise various tests and brain scans to understand the extent of a migraine. Otherwise, if you suffer from sudden and severe headaches, you need specific vision checks with CT scan and MRI.

## **Scans and Tests**

### **CT scans**

A CT scan is a computerized tomography scan of your head. Doctors conduct this scan through X-rays and try to locate any untoward growth, swelling, or inflammation that could be the cause of your headache. This test can divulge details of sinus problems, strokes, and tumors.

### **MRI scans**

An MRI scan is a scan through Magnetic Resonance Imaging. This is a diagnostic procedure to form images of your inner body parts and organs through a combination of radio waves, computer technology, and a strong magnetic field. You lie on a table while the detectors take measurements of your head from various angles. Different computer processes form three-dimensional pictures of your brain and head.

An MRI is a costlier procedure but delivers detailed revelations. MRI scans are without iodine or contrast dye. You get to know of any sinus problems, malignant diseases, skull fractures, concussions or other serious medical problems.

### **Lumbar Puncture or Spinal Tap**

Sometimes doctors take some fluid from your lumbar region for testing about your headaches. This test detects any brain diseases like subarachnoid hemorrhage or meningitis. Tests of a sample of the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) can detect any such disease. You could develop a headache after this test as drawing of fluid upsets your CSF pressure. This test carries the risk of infection too. The test lasts for around half an hour.

### **Sinus X-Ray**

This can detect and provide a clearer picture if you have any sinus-related problems where your headache could be an aftermath of such infection.

## **Neurological and Ophthalmology Tests**

Different neurological diseases, including epilepsy, could be the cause of your headache, and eye and vision problems could also trigger a severe headache. Therefore, your doctor conducts tests to determine existence of any of these diseases and resultant headaches.

## **Skeletal Tests**

Normally, all headaches are due to imbalances of skeletal and neuromuscular muscles. A headache might be dependent on placement and positioning of your jaw, skull and neck bones. Any dislocation or wrong shape and positioning could cause severe headaches.

There are more than 300 muscles attaching your jaws, neck, and skull. 298 of these muscles do the work of closing your lower jaw to fit in well within the skull. A normal human uses the lower jaw more than 5,000 times each day. Therefore, any abnormal compression, malalignment or dysfunction in the muscles around these organs can cause headaches.

## **Other Factors**

### **Orthodontic Care**

Orthodontic care is essential for proper functioning of your teeth and lower jaw. Premolar extractions and other teeth problems sometimes shrink the jaw joints. This leads to migraine headaches. Hence, you may not have any migraine headaches in your genes but improper care during dentistry could lead to the occurrence of a migraine.

### **Chronic Neck and Shoulder Pain**

Neck, shoulder, and jawbones work with each other. Any of these bones that suffer any damage can cause problems for the others. You need to have a proper tests and treatment to deal with all such problems. Physical therapy can provide temporary relief. Prolonged prevalence of the problem causes a migraine.

Perennial tiredness and exhaustion could be due to sleep disturbances and lack of a deep and regular sleep pattern. Such deprivation could be due to certain specific problems like snoring asthma, or sleep apnea. Treating these disorders can provide relief from headaches.

Prolonged pain and physical disorders often cause anxiousness and depression for you. Depression causes problems in your nervous system. The most important nerve of your body is the trigeminal nerve. This nerve takes care of fifty percent of processing and working of your brain. It controls blood flow and regulation within your head. Any disturbance in the working of this nerve may cause serious problems to your brain and its functioning. This leads to severe pain in your head and a migraine.

### **Conclusion**

These tests can help to throw light on any medical condition you have. Doctors can then analyze the occurrence of your headache and whether it may be because of the existence of such conditions.

If none of your symptoms or tests reveal anything indicating any disease, you suffer from migraine headaches.

A migraine exposes certain symptoms and signs, but these differ from person to person and from situation to situation. Therefore, you cannot assert its existence is only due to the presence of specific factors. So, doctors must check for the existence of any possible disease.

## Part-IV: Prevention of Migraine headaches

### 13. Ten Tips to Avoid Migraine Headaches

Medications can resolve your migraine attacks to a certain extent. Adopt certain changes in your lifestyle to lower the severity and intensity of migraine attacks.

#### Ten tips to avoid migraine headaches:

- 1. Maintain a “migraine diary”.** Record when and how your migraine starts. Also, note down your diet, any stress problems, headache medications, or any other intake and happening. You can thereby do away with any migraine triggers. A trigger can have a relation to something even forty-eight hours before a migraine attack. Such a diary helps your physician to study your physiological behavior and more quickly arrive at possible reasons for your migraine attack.
- 2. Provide good rest for your body.** Aim to have a sound sleep for about nine hours at night. At the same time, do not oversleep or indulge in long sleeping hours during the daytime. Maintain a regular time schedule of going to bed and waking up in the morning. Stick to the routine during holidays and vacations too, as much as possible.
- 3. Develop a regular exercise routine.** You could try simple aerobic exercises like walking, swimming, cycling or other muscle relaxation exercises. Make sure that you do not over-exert yourself and trigger a headache.
- 4. Along with physical exercise, do simple mental exercises also.** Maintain your cool through relaxing techniques like meditation, yoga, soothing music, reading a book, enjoying a hot bath or even gardening. Set a specific time of each day for you to be alone. Think and focus on yourself, your needs and your feelings. This recharges your energy and

can help you to develop immense inner peace. A cool mind shoos away many a migraine attack.

- 5. Hydrate your body sufficiently.** Drink plenty of water and other fluids. Take care to reduce caffeine and certain fruit juices as they could reduce the water available to your brain and help to start a migraine.
- 6. Have regular healthy meals and snacks.** Never skip meals or indulge excessively in fast food. These actions can lead to a drop in blood sugar levels and, thereby, a sharp drop in oxygen supply to brain. Plan balanced meals at every mealtime and allocate some free time to have your meal in peace despite hectic schedules.
- 7. Avoid specific scents, perfumes and strong aromas which may affect you.** If you are aware of any earlier triggers do away with them. Smokers may have to quit the habit to get relief from migraines.
- 8. Reduce your intake of estrogen. CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR FIRST.** Migraines and high estrogen levels are a potent combination. Similarly, reduce your intake of high blood pressure and stroke medications as they contain high estrogen levels. Birth control pills and medications for hormone replacement therapy may be factors in your migraines.
- 9. Form support groups among friends, colleagues and in chat rooms and online forums.** You will find out you are not alone. Share and compare your views and be more aware of your migraine problem. These groups offer huge moral support and guidance too as you realize that you are not the lone person fighting an unending battle.
- 10. Take good care of your overall health.** This may prevent many migraine attacks. Do not create difficult goals or deadlines. Wear sunglasses and other shaded glasses to protect your eyes from the glare of sunlight or other light too. Do not become tense with the small things in life as such incidents are a part of our lives. Take things in your stride and

deal with them daily. Do not carry forward your misgivings, emotions, or other stress. Live in day-tight compartments.

## 14. Migraine Headaches and Sleep Apnea

**S**leep Apnea is a major cause for a migraine. Sleep Apnea is a sleep disorder that keeps you from getting the proper sleep which you need. Common symptoms include loud snoring and awakening in the middle of the night, tiredness and overall lethargy.

Instead, you sleep excessively during the daytime. The effects of such irregular sleep patterns are headaches, weight gain, impotency, slow healing, poor temperament and other health issues.

Lack of proper and adequate sleep denies the necessary rest for your body. You are less alert, develop bad moods and cognitive performance levels are low. You suffer from persistent migraine headaches, which sometimes last for a whole day or more.

Sometimes, you experience a sharp pain shooting from the base of your skull to your temples and forehead. This may be the warning signals of a severe migraine attack.

The best way to counter-attack against such sleep disorders is to seek professional medical advice. You could also benefit from making behavioral and lifestyle changes in your daily routine.

**Nasal Continuous Positive Air Pressure** (CPAP) masks can help resolve your sleep apnea problems by providing sufficient oxygen during your sleep. Doctors could also conduct a study of your sleep to record body movements and disturbances in sleep.

These studies help doctors to diagnose the core problem and administer suitable remedies. Curing sleep apnea can relieve your migraine headaches which result from such apnea.

## Part-V: Natural Remedies for Migraine headaches

### 15. Natural Remedies to Prevent or Ease Migraine Headaches

There are many medicines designed to alleviate your migraine pain. These medicines try to eradicate the pain but the pain-causing elements remain in your constitution. So, you might experience the same type of migraine again.

Natural remedies may prove to be the long-term solution for your migraine pain or ease your migraine pain. A migraine is often due to certain food triggers consumed during the twenty-four hours before the migraine. Maintaining a diary to record your migraine pain, time of their occurrences along with details of your food intake can help you focus on possible suspects.

Many people develop adverse reactions to dairy products. Therefore, reducing or doing away with milk or butter may bring in positive results. Foods containing sulfites and nitrites, like meat, chocolate, caffeine and red wine can also trigger a migraine attack. These dilate your blood capillaries and increase blood flow to brain. This leads to migraine headaches.

**Drink ginger tea** to reduce the effects of nausea during a migraine attack. Intake of two to four grams of ginger daily is good for your health.

**Acupuncture** promotes stimulation across the channels of energy throughout your body.

Acupuncture specialists can administer proper treatment by massaging with forefinger and thumbs. This may offer good relief from your migraine headaches.

Inhaling essential oils like Rosemary, Lavender, and Jasmine can lessen migraine headaches.

Magnetic necklaces seem also to offer relief for some people.

## 16. Treating Migraine Headaches with Acupressure

Sometimes, alternative therapies are effective in treating migraine headaches.

Acupressure is one such treatment method that uses the concept of application of pressure to specific points on the body to relieve pain. Acupressure is based on the ancient Chinese system of healing.

To relieve pain, you must use your fingers and thumb to massage the pressure points on the head, around the eyes, at the base of the neck and on the temples. You can massage with your thumbs at the base of the skull for a few minutes, with your head held back slightly.

You can massage at these specific pressure points for symptomatic relief.

Massaging the GB20 point may give relief from neck pain and migraine headaches. For the full effect of this massage, you must sit on the chair with your thumbs pressing the GB20 points located at the base of the head, at some distance from the center of the neck.

This point is located at the base of the skull where it joins the neck and back. It is used in the treatment of acute disorders, such as the common cold, influenza, headache, neck pain, and fever. It may lower blood pressure and relaxes tension in the area of the eyes.

You can put pressure, using your thumb, on the Lv 3 point, which is the space between the big toe and the second toe. You must repeat this for a few minutes for both feet.

In the book, 'Modern Clinic Necessities for Acupuncture and Moxibustion' by Zhang Ren and Dong Zhi Lin, you can learn about the different areas that you can press to gain relief.

Some people have experienced almost instant relief by pressing hard on the fleshy point between their thumb and index finger for a few minutes.

You must first become familiar with all the pressure points on the body and know which points to press to treat the various types of migraine headaches.

Once you learn the points, breathe deeply and do not massage for more than a few minutes at a time. Acupressure may help in treatment of migraine headaches.

## 17. Treating Migraine Headaches with Massage Therapy

There are specific points at the base of the neck and the temples that are believed by some practitioners to be trigger points of migraine headaches. Massaging these trigger points can help relieve some of the pain of migraine headaches. When the pain subsides, the person can sleep better and this helps them to cope better with migraine headaches. When undergoing a massage, remember to be gentle.

If you experience any pain, stop immediately.

Always get a massage from a trained professional with the proper qualifications, to avoid injury.

The basis of massage treatment is healing by touch. Hence, masseurs mostly use their hands and feet for the massage. Masseurs use carefully applied pressure to relieve the pressure on the trigger points and to bring respite to the individual.

A massage is beneficial because it improves blood circulation and digestion and helps those with hypertension. To start with, you must undergo a massage a few times a week for about two months.

There are different systems of massage therapy, each with its benefits. Reflexology believes in massaging specific points on the soles of the feet that correspond to the different areas of the body, to give relief from the pain of migraine headaches.

Other massages include a head massage to soothe the nerves of the brain that send the impulses of pain. You can undergo an acupressure massage or a deep tissue massage, depending on the intensity of your pain. An individual suffering from migraine headaches may benefit from massage therapy, provided a qualified person does the massage.

## 18. Treating Migraine Headaches with Detoxification

Today we lead stressful lives and pay little attention to leading a healthy life.

We eat junk food in large quantities, since nobody has time to cook nutritious food. As a result, we ingest many toxins through the food and the environment.

The body has a mechanism for eliminating these substances. However, when we abuse our body by over consumption of junk food, the level of the toxins increases and the body cannot function properly, leading to an increase in toxicity.

These poisonous substances may help to cause diseases like cancer or other lifestyle diseases like obesity and heart disease.

In such a scenario, it is a good idea to undergo a detoxification program to cleanse the body and the soul. The detoxification involves elimination of waste products through the body by consuming a light diet of fruits and vegetables or totally keeping off food for a day. Detoxification can lead to a healthier lifestyle and peace of mind that can minimize occurrence of migraine headaches.

You must adopt a detoxification program based on your needs and follow the natural seasonal cycle for this. Include natural organic foods and consume a lot of water. Do not use allopathic medicines for any ailment, but go for naturopathy or a homeopathic system of medicines. Consult a qualified naturopath for a suitable detoxification plan if you are not confident of doing this yourself.

Initially, you may experience weakness but, with determination, you can undergo a detoxification successfully.

Detoxification introduces you to a healthier lifestyle. Undergoing this process helps you feel light and free of stress. This, in turn, minimizes the trigger factors of migraine headaches and may bring some relief.

## 19. Treating Migraine Headaches with Herbs

Herbal remedies for treating migraine headaches may be effective and some people claim that they have no side effects. These herbs act over a period of time and one must take them as a preventive remedy, not while experiencing migraine headaches.

You must consult a naturopath to get information about the correct dosage and the form in which to consume the herb. **Only take these herbs under your doctor's supervision if you are taking medicines regularly, to avoid any adverse reaction.**

The most popular herb to treat migraine headaches is **feverfew**. Other useful herbs are ginger, peppermint, willow, ginkgo biloba and passionflower. You can consume these herbs as a nasal spray or in the form of a light tea.

Avoid peppermint if you suffer from acidity.

Ginkgo improves blood circulation to the brain and may relieve a migraine. However, it can react unfavorably with aspirin, so never take the two together.

Pepper or capsaicin inhaled as a nasal spray improves pain tolerance and can prevent cluster headaches.

You can use herbal oil to massage your head and temples to get relief from the headache.

When undergoing herbal treatment, be sure to consume pure extracts sourced from a proper store. Always ensure that you are not allergic to any of the herbs to avoid future complications.

## 20. Treating Migraine Headaches with Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a system of pain relief based on the use of needles to stimulate the nervous system. Acupuncture can be a preventive therapy in migraine treatment.

Acupuncture must be limited to the arms and legs and **never performed on the neck and head region.**

The treatment involves inserting needles at several pressure points so that the blood flow in this region increases. The acupuncturist adjusts the needles manually or by electrical stimulation. This helps in preventing migraine headaches and is most effective when done in the sitting position.

Be sure to undergo this treatment at the hands of a qualified acupuncturist, to avoid mishaps. Ensure that the needles used for the procedure are hygienic.

Puncturing at the wrong points can cause a lung collapse that can be fatal for the patient. Unhygienic needles can cause infections and, in severe cases, lead to hepatitis.

Acupuncture stimulates the hypothalamus and helps control the nerves that cause the sensation of pain. It is intended to restore the balance of energy in an individual's body, so that he gets a reprieve from migraine headaches.

Another explanation for the efficacy of acupuncture is that the treatment releases opioids that have a palliative effect.

Researchers are conducting several studies to try to confirm the effectiveness of acupuncture in pain relief.

Practitioners believe that it can form an effective part of a person's migraine headache treatment by improving the flow of blood and proper stimulation of his nervous system.

## 21. Treating Migraine Headaches with Biofeedback

Different alternative systems may help in the holistic treatment of migraine headaches. Biofeedback is one of them, where the individual masters the art of controlling some of their body mechanisms. The person must undergo comprehensive training with a qualified therapist for a few months before venturing alone.

The first step in biofeedback is to relax your muscles and regulate your breathing. The success of biofeedback depends on how well you can judge your nervous system by reading the indication from your body temperature and muscle tension.

By becoming aware of an impending tension, you can learn to relax and to control your breathing, to minimize the stress. This is intended to prevent the occurrence of migraine headaches.

You can start the training sessions for a few minutes several times a week. The sessions involve the use of instruments to measure various body parameters that indicate tension. Once you master the technique, you can start the biofeedback mechanism yourself, without these aids.

Before the onset of a migraine, your hands will turn cold and you may start sweating profusely. You can use biofeedback to think of pleasant things and learn to calm down until your body temperature returns to normal.

You can use biofeedback as part of treatment of migraine headaches. The advantage is that you minimize the intake of pain relievers as you gain control over the symptoms of the migraine. Moreover controlling your senses is the first step towards the effective management of migraine headaches.

## 22. Treating Migraine Headaches with Exercise

It is necessary to exercise often to lead a healthy life. You must exercise for at least half an hour a few times a week. Exercising helps improve blood circulation, relieves tension in the muscles, and the fresh air is good for your health.

The simplest and least demanding exercise is walking. You can walk outdoors in a park, away from the congestion of the city. If you have a busy schedule, you can walk on the treadmill or exercise at home on an exercise bike.

You can become a member of a health club and workout a few times a week. This takes some effort and involves an ongoing financial cost, but the healthy lifestyle minimizes occurrence of migraine headaches.

If the weather is poor, do mall walks. Many people use the mall as a place to get their walks in the early morning.

Exercising releases endorphins that minimize the pain and thus reduces occurrence of the migraines. You can try light aerobic exercises a few times a week under a trained instructor. The workout must include a warm up, a twenty-minute exercise session and a cooling down period. Many studies prove a direct co-relation between regular exercising and a reduction in the number of migraine attacks.

Mild neck exercises can provide relief as they improve circulation in the neck and head region. However, go to a licensed chiropractor to get the maximum benefit from this treatment.

Setting up an exercise schedule just needs a little determination and some investment. The results are very positive and can reduce your dependence on drugs. Thus, it is worthwhile to exercise regularly to prevent migraine headaches.

## 23. Treating Migraine Headaches with Vitamins and Supplements

Scientists have conducted several studies to prove that specific vitamins and supplements provide relief from migraine headaches. Many supplements may be effective as preventive agents but you must only take them under a doctor's guidance to ensure the correct dosage of these supplements and ensure there are no harmful side effects.

Check for any adverse interactions with your regular medicines, before taking these vitamins.

**Here is a list of some supplements that some people believe are useful:**

**Magnesium**, taken twice daily, may help to maintain the flexibility of the blood vessels and avoid migraines.

You can take **Vitamin B** to reduce the intensity of the headaches.

Fatty acids like gamma-linolenic (GLA) and **alpha-linolenic (ALA)** fatty acid minimize the occurrence of migraine headaches.

You can take **L-arginine**, useful in the synthesis of nitric oxide that is essential for proper movement of the arteries.

A **combination of calcium and vitamin D** may also reduce occurrence of migraines.

A standard **daily multi-vitamin capsule or tablet** may be useful.

**Vitamin C** is present in citrus fruits seems to strengthen the blood vessels. Also, consuming foods that are rich in bioflavonoids are believed by some to aid the absorption of Vitamin C.

Some people take fish oil capsules daily and claim that they get relief from migraine headaches.

Some **compounds of feverfew and magnesium** seem to be effective in prevention of a migraine with some sufferers. Some people benefit from taking **tryptophan** in some form, as it has an effect on the serotonin in your body. Serotonin plays many roles. It can have an effect on the blood vessels. When serotonin levels are high, blood vessels constrict (shrink). When serotonin levels fall, the blood vessels dilate (swell). This swelling can cause pain or other problems.

Many things can affect the level of serotonin in your body, including your level of blood sugar, certain foods and changes in your estrogen level if you're a woman.

These vitamins and supplements may be effective in treatment of migraine headaches when taken over a period. One must have patience when taking them.

**If you experience any ill effects, immediately stop taking them.**

## 24. Treating Migraine Headaches with Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese Medicine, or TCM, is a health care system according to the age-old medical practices of China. This medical system has its roots in two classic texts, 'Nei Jing' and 'Nan Jing', which were written between 100 B.C and 200 A.D.

TCM practitioners believe in the core concept that diseases are due to imbalances in body energy levels. Therefore, TCM does not aim at curing a particular ailment. Instead, it is a process to relieve your body of current imbalances and assure body functioning in proper alignment with Nature.

TCM attempts effective relief for your migraine headaches. But the relief obtained is not the same for any two persons suffering from a migraine even if they exhibit similar symptoms.

TCM believes a migraine to be due to problems in your individual body constitution. Therefore, traditional Chinese remedies do not offer any quick, temporary relief from your migraine headaches. Rather, they determine the imbalance causing factors and treat them. This changes your body responses to such imbalances and you receive relief from future migraine pain.

Chinese medicine practitioners analyze your body constitution by conducting a physical examination of your body parts like eyes, tongue, skin color, urinary and bowel movements, sleep and food patterns, and the like. The pulse and the look of your tongue are tools for TCM practitioners to understand your biological constitution.

They suggest remedies for your migraine after coordinating them with your symptoms.

## 25. Treating Migraine Headaches with Homeopathy

Homeopathy practitioners believe in treating migraine headaches by using medicines made from natural ingredients. Always get this treatment under consultation of a licensed homeopath for the best results.

A homeopath can diagnose your disease holistically and prescribe the correct dosage accordingly. The following is a list of homeopathic medicines depending on the different types of migraines.

**Bryonia** may be useful in treating a heavy headache on the left side of the head where the person cannot tolerate any movement and feels nauseous.

**Belladonna** is used to treat migraine headaches on the lower head and neck region.

**Gelsemium** may be suitable for those who complain of weakness and affected vision. Fear exacerbates this headache and it may be reduced by urination.

**Cimicifuga** may be helpful for headaches experienced during menstrual periods or long-term studying. The head pulsates, as do the neck muscles.

**Cyclamen** may relieve headaches that affect the person's vision. The individual who needs this treatment is susceptible to cold and may experience a pain in the ear.

**Ignatia** may relieve the headache that follows an emotional outburst. These headaches can also cause painful spasms in the face and the neck muscles.

**Iris versicolor** may relieve migraines that cause blurred vision.

**Kali bichromicum** may minimize the headaches over the eyebrows.

**Lachesis** may relieve migraine due to ill-fitting clothes.

Other homeopathic remedies for a variety of migraine headaches include **Natrum muriaticum**, **Sanguinaria**, **Sepia**, **silica** and **Spigelia**.

Homeopathy has a broad spectrum of medicines to treat the different types of migraine headaches.

## 26. Treating Migraine Headaches with Craniosacral Therapy

The brain is a complex system that forms the central nervous system along with the spinal cord. The craniosacral system attempts to treat migraine headaches by working on the fluids and membranes that cover these two organs.

Any wrong move on the practitioner's part can immobilize you for life and cause severe problems. You must undergo this therapy under supervision of a licensed practitioner, since it involves working on the most sensitive areas of the body.

The therapy sessions can last for about an hour where the practitioner monitors the fluid flow to the brain and detects any abnormalities in this flow. He then gently applies pressure to relieve the stress from those areas and to bring respite to the person. The pressure relaxes the nerve or the blood vessels that were constricted and causing the headache.

The practitioner uses very light weight on the affected area to remove the detected constraint.

There are several critics of this therapy and the claims that it is effective for migraine headaches, neck and back pains and various other brain related diseases. Critics claim that the bones of the skull fuse in the teenage years and it is difficult to detect throbbing in this area.

No studies can prove any positive impact of this therapy. Therefore, undergo this therapy at your own risk, since it is not an accepted method of treatment for migraine headaches.

## 27. Treating Migraine Headaches with Cognitive Therapy

Cognitive therapy is a therapeutic and behavioral relief for treatment of brain disorders like anxiety and depression. This therapy aims at reducing the negativity in you. Negativity leads to anxiousness causing stress. Stress is believed by some to be the major culprit behind most migraine headaches.

Cognitive therapists or practitioners help you to become capable of controlling your flow of thoughts. These therapists offer behavioral training to cope with any form of stress. You learn various skills to control and form positive responses to stressful situations.

Cognitive therapy does not function by itself. It is the culmination of positive therapy with certain mood stabilizers. These mood stabilizers are medications for treating many mental disorders.

The foundation of cognitive therapy is about coordinated interaction between your feelings or emotions, thinking patterns or cognition, and behavioral tendencies and patterns. The main force is your thinking power or your thoughts.

Positive thoughts bring forth positive behavior while negative thoughts bring forth negative behavior. Hence, cognitive therapy aims at development of positive behavior and elimination of negative behavior.

Reduction or elimination of negative behavior is not an instant process. Cognitive therapy provides you sufficient support to overcome obstacles and forgo negative thoughts and behavior. You remain upbeat about your very existence. This positive outlook helps you overcome all kinds of stress in life, thereby reducing the incidence of migraine headaches in you.

## 28. Treating Migraine Headaches with Energy Healing

**E**nergy healing is the adoption of different techniques to restore body energy levels and maintain an uninterrupted and regulated flow within it. 'Energy' here refers to the universal healing power within every person. Such energy healing assumes different names like ki in Japanese, qi in Chinese, prana in India and so on.

Energy healing therapists believe that there are many energy patterns within your body. Such flows of energy evolve and spurts out in the form of an aura around you. A balanced flow of energy in their proper and regulated circles ensures good health. Disruption in this flow signals physical and emotional upsets causing pain and disease.

**Energy healing** is believed by practitioners to be effective in treating migraines. They say that you can use it as a preventive therapy too, as energy blockages are a prelude to the onset of disease. Energy healing is available in different techniques like healing touch, Reiki, therapeutic touch, shiatsu, and others.

Energy healing therapists or practitioners use different tools like colored and dim lights, aromatherapy, harmonics, and dialogs to relieve your migraine problems. Depending on the intensity and severity of your migraine, you could need just a few or several hour-long energy healing sessions.

In all, energy healing is no substitute for migraine medications. You can take up these besides your regular treatments. Severe depression patients with migraines need their physiotherapist with them during such sessions.

## 29. Treating Migraine Headaches with Ayurveda

Ayurveda is an age-old form of Indian medicine. According to Ayurveda, a migraine is due to modern lifestyle patterns disrupting the body and mind constitution, which is tridosha.

Body disorders in Ayurveda could be due to pitta, vata, or kapha. However, excessive disorder levels cause pitta to move into the main body systems like the cardiovascular system. This disrupts the normal flow of blood. Characteristics of pitta include light sensitivity, anger, irritability, bleeding nose and pain.

Blood vessels dilate and put pressure on the nerves which leads to migraine attacks. The most effective remedy is to reduce pitta by avoiding consumption of spicy and fermented foods, citrus and sour fruits.

Intake of soothing pitta diet is the best remedy. Such pitta herbal remedy consists of a mixture of brahmi, shatavari, jutamamsi and musta. Half a teaspoon of such a remedy in lukewarm water after breakfast and dinner can reduce pitta levels substantially.

Other Ayurveda herbal remedies include application of sandalwood oil on the forehead, temples, nose, and heart, using gudachi, bala, and ashwagandha, with many liver cleansers like brahmi, aloe vera gel, rhubarb, and fennel and ginger tea.

Avoid direct sunlight and go for moonlight walks near water and flower gardens. Hot oil head massage is also an effective remedy. Different yogic postures with cooling pranayama are effective remedies to reduce pitta and associated migraine. A gentle squeeze of your earlobes by pulling your ears down and yawning can lessen pressure on blood vessels, thereby providing relief during migraine attacks.

## **30. Treating Migraine Headaches with Environment and Lifestyle Changes**

Often, a migraine occurs because of faulty lifestyle patterns. Certain environmental factors also cause severe headaches leading to a migraine.

### **Environmental Changes**

Inhaling of substances like paint solvents and industrial chemicals can trigger a migraine attack. Carbon monoxide, natural gas, propane, cigarette smoke and other gases contain specific toxins. These toxins cause headaches on inhalation.

Similarly, Formaldehyde evaporation takes place from furniture, carpets and plywood. This evaporation contains various air pollution gases, which cause migraine. You can stay away from such allergic substances and places to reduce the incidence of your migraine attacks. Also, avoid bright lights and loud sounds.

### **Lifestyle Changes**

Specific changes to your lifestyle patterns cannot only reduce but may eliminate your migraine episodes. Timely and healthy meals are necessary. Develop a regular exercise regimen with sufficient physical exercise for all body muscles.

Additionally, set a mental relaxation time to just be with yourself and soothers like music, gardening, reading books etc. Also, deal with one thing at a time and do not overload yourself. Reduce stress by avoiding any disputes and resolving any that you cannot avoid in a calm manner.

Get sound sleep for around nine hours every night. Develop a steady pattern of sleeping and waking. Reduce smoking and your intake of caffeine. You could also stay from potential migraine triggers like specific food items, alcohol and certain fruits and vegetables.

## 31. Treating Migraine Headaches During Pregnancy

Migraines are more common among women and therefore, you need to take extra care during pregnancies. There are no definitive medical reports to suggest any specific medication for a migraine during pregnancy. Pregnancy is a period to avoid any sort of extra medications, let alone for a migraine, as you are unaware of the consequences of such medicines on your unborn baby.

The best way to combat migraines during pregnancy is to follow a slow tapering off of medication under the supervision of your own doctor. Start by planning your pregnancy and reduce migraine medications months before you conceive.

In some severe migraine attacks, tapering off medication is not possible. Expert medical opinion can help you understand effects of medication on your baby. Certain medicines like beta-blockers and tricyclics are comparatively safe while medications like Depakote and Imitrex injections could cause birth defects.

Food cravings are a sure feature of pregnancy. Pregnant women need to take extra care of their food habits. Avoid foods with additives, foods high in MSG and other common triggers like aged cheese, sourdough bread, certain citrus fruits and others.

Sometimes, migraine attacks start during pregnancy. You then need to have a thorough medical examination to check for tumors, meningitis or other neurological diseases.

You can offset many a migraine attack by resting or sleeping in a cool, dark room with an ice pack on your forehead. Alternatively, take very small doses of caffeine to get relief.

## 32. Herbs for Aromatherapy to Treat Migraine Headaches

Aromatherapy is a practice of using simple plant or herbal oils for treating different psychological and physiological disorders. This therapy is as old as human civilization itself. This is an alternative form of treatment. The fresh scents of flowers or extracted oils may help to reduce tension and heal associated headaches like a migraine.

**It is best to consult your physician before trying aromatherapy for migraine relief.**

Aromatherapy offers different essential oils like Lavender, Jasmine, Peppermint, Eucalyptus, Rosemary and Melissa as remedial relief for migraines. You need to mix small quantities of such oils with other carrier oils or alcohol and then apply lightly to the temples and forehead with a gentle massage. Sniffing such oils leads to intake of such oils to different parts of the brain. These may reduce emotional upheavals and hormone releases.

A few precautions include avoidance of rosemary and marjoram oils by pregnant women and patients with high blood pressure or epilepsy.

Never apply such aroma oils directly on your skin without appropriate dilution. Do not use such oils near your eyes. Homeopathy users should avoid peppermint oil.

Aromatherapy is not permanent relief or a 'cure' for your migraine. It is only a complementary therapy. Effects are very individualistic and can differ greatly from person to person. For some it may offer instant and good relief from stress and relax your nerves, while it may not have any effect at all for others.

### **33. Herbs for Cleansing Teas to Treat Migraine Headaches**

Cleansing teas like ginger tea may relieve many migraine headaches. Add either 20g of dried ginger or 40g of fresh ginger to three cups of water. Simmer on low heat for twenty to thirty minutes. Pour out the needed quantity and store the rest in a cool place. You can refrigerate it if you want to use it the next day.

Cleansing teas help improve functioning of kidneys by toning and rejuvenating them. Diuretic herbs in tea are good detoxifiers. These detoxifiers may release pressure on your blood vessels and nerves.

These herbs help eliminate water retention in kidneys and flush out toxins from your body. This may reduce migraine headaches.

## 34. Relieving Your Stress Triggers

Although there are many different migraine triggers, the most common and prevalent triggers are stress and food items. Stress tops the list in causing migraine headaches. Our modern lifestyle is so demanding that stress exists in every part of life.

Stress will continue to play a dominant role in the future too. Although a difficult proposition, the most effective solution to your migraine problems is considerable reduction of stress levels.

The incidence of migraine headaches is higher in women than in men. Financial stress is common to both genders. Such stress tends to control your moods. Your body responses vary according to your moods.

Higher stress leads to depression and associated pressure on your nervous and vascular systems. This causes a migraine. Lowering stress levels can eliminate depression but may not provide relief from migraine headaches.

Hence, effective treatment is to bring about changes in your physical and emotional reactions to stressful situations. These stress-relieving techniques include relaxation tools and biofeedback.

You can also monitor the occurrence and intensity of your migraine headaches. You can then correlate stressful incidents that trigger emotions or physical exertions at such times. These could be the causes of your migraine attacks.

Evaluation of different therapies can help you locate the ideal de-stressor for providing relief from your migraine attacks.

## 35. Avoiding Foods that Trigger Migraine Headaches

Food is an important migraine trigger. More than 25% of migraines are due to dietary factors. Food and their additives may contain certain chemicals that affect blood pressure. This restricts blood vessels and reduces blood flow to different body parts and mainly your brain. This leads to migraines.

Common chemicals present in food triggers are Monosodium glutamate (MSG), Phenyl ethylamine, Sodium, Tryamine and Histam 5. Migraine food triggers may include dairy products, pickles and marinated food, chocolate and cocoa, citrus fruits, raisins, bananas, plums, peanuts and peanut butter and fermented products with high levels of soy sauce.

It is easy to prescribe avoidance of migraine trigger foods. However, to arrive at the exact trigger is a difficult job. Different foods function as triggers in different individuals. You cannot eliminate large sections of your regular food intake as it could lead to lack of sufficient nutrition.

Eliminate the major suspects like chocolate, Tryamine foods like aged cheese and red wines and sodium-rich foods like pickles and marinated items. Similarly, monosodium glutamate is a food additive which is also a trigger.

You can reduce the effect of such triggers by reducing your intake of them. Thereafter, introduce them in small quantities to try to isolate your major triggers. Stay away from such foods for a considerable time to regroup from your migraine attacks.

You can try including them later.

## 36. Treating Migraine Headaches with Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques may work wonders for your migraine headache. However, it is not simple or easy to start relaxing during your migraine attack. You have to concentrate deeply to understand and develop relaxation techniques.

Relaxation techniques include autogenic training, progressive muscle relaxation and meditation. Autogenic training uses your visual imagination to progress into a state of deep relaxation. You think of any peaceful place, and thereafter try to concentrate on moving your physical sensations from your feet upward to your brain.

The second stage in your relaxation techniques is slow and steady relaxation of all your body muscles. You start from the muscles in your toes progressing to those in your head.

The final step in this relaxation technique is meditation. You concentrate on repetitive utterances of specific words or phrases, while concentrating on any single form or point. All these together reduce your stress levels considerably and eliminate negative thoughts so that you can cope better with your stress.

Relaxation techniques for treating migraines consist of deep breathing, stretching exercises, visualization and other passive methods. All these techniques aim at reducing stress factors in your muscles and brain. Reduction of stress can help reduce your migraine.

Relaxation techniques have no side effects and help to improve your overall health and mental stability. Besides a relief from migraine attacks, you also benefit through improved body awareness and agility.

## 37. Relieving Caffeine Headaches

Caffeine is both a reliever and possible cause for your migraine headaches, or more aptly - caffeine headaches. Excess of caffeine causes severe headaches while small amounts of caffeine in restricted dosages can prevent severe migraines.

Most migraine sufferers withdraw their caffeine intake abruptly to prevent migraine headaches. This is a good proposition provided you are able to cope with such withdrawal. However, you can try withdrawing your caffeine intake over a period of time, cutting back slowly.

Theoretically, total abstinence from caffeine may reduce or eliminate migraines. In reality, though, this is not the case. Stopping caffeine means stopping all other caffeine related products like tea, liqueur, pudding, chocolate, diet pills, energy drinks and so on.

Also, maintain a diary of your intake of caffeine in different products with the time and amount of dosage. In addition, also note if such intake triggered any headaches at any particular time. This will help in getting relief from caffeine headaches.

## 38. Can You Use Feverfew for Migraine Relief?

**Feverfew has many side effects like mouth ulcers, sore mouth, upset stomach, and sometimes damage to muscles. Pregnant women should avoid feverfew, as it is a natural abortifacient.**

Feverfew is an herb from the chrysanthemum family with the biological name, *Tanacetum parthenium*. Feverfew is the same as Bachelor's button, and has been a popular herbal remedy since the Dark Ages. The earliest use of the herb was to alleviate fever symptoms; hence, the name is feverfew.

Feverfew is a common preventive for migraines. **It cannot provide relief from your migraine headache once the pain starts.** Nevertheless, some people take it as a preventive measure a few days before the onset of a migraine.

Feverfew herbs contain parthenolide and can restrict the formation of certain chemicals like serotonin and prostaglandins. These chemicals inhibit the flow of blood through your blood vessels. Therefore, intake of feverfew may ease the occurrences and intensity of migraine headaches.

Feverfew is available in the form of capsules, pills, tinctures, and teas. Most prefer feverfew capsules and pills. Some try chewing the leaves while some use the freeze-dried form of the herb. You should take feverfew after food.

Some claim the best relief is available by chewing one small leaf each day. However, feverfew tastes very bitter.

## Part-VI: Treatment of Migraine Headaches

### 39. Treatment Options for Migraine Headaches

A patient who has frequent migraine attacks **must first consult a doctor** for treatment options. Treatment of migraine headaches follows a two-step approach.

The first is pain relief during a migraine and the second is prevention of the headaches. A chronic sufferer must keep a diary of his daily activities, food habits and sleep patterns. In this, he must note the frequency, intervals and duration of each migraine headache. He must discuss this record with his doctor, who can help co-relate the triggers for migraines. It is advisable to keep away from the triggering factors of a migraine.

If you suspect a migraine approaching, you must immediately take preventive medication and rest in a dark, silent room. This can provide relief within a short time.

It is a bad idea to avoid medication, as it can worsen your condition. The dosage of the medicine depends on the regularity and intensity of the headaches. Some people may be allergic to specific drugs or may suffer from other health problems.

Consult your doctor who will keep in mind all these factors before prescribing any medicine.

The doctor will usually start you on a paracetamol or an ibuprofen as a palliative. These are effective for mild to medium migraines but repeated consumption can lead to stomach ulcers and gastric bleeding. Some people might experience a stroke or a heart attack by taking these NSAIDS. You can even get reverse headaches due to regular consumption of these drugs as they start having a negative effect on your body mechanisms.

Other pain relief medication specially developed to relieve migraines is triptans that imitates the effect of serotonin, by attaching to serotonin receptors and contracting the blood vessels. This drug is available as a tablet, spray and injections. It brings relief within a few minutes but has side-effects like vomiting and weakness.

Ergots are another class of anti-migraine medication with many side effects, so they are not prescribed much.

There are some treatments, like metoclopramide, for the vomiting which goes with some migraine attack. This works best when taken before the onset of the migraine. It aids emptying of the stomach so that other migraine medication can be absorbed quickly, to bring faster relief to the patient.

You can take preventive medicines to reduce occurrence of a migraine. However, **only take them under a doctor's supervision** as they can have serious side effects.

Some doctors advise beta-blockers and other drugs used in treatment of high blood pressure and heart disease. Taking these drugs can make the individual giddy and queasy.

Some drugs for treating mental depression can alleviate migraines. They work on the serotonin levels in the brain and relieve migraines.

Some doctors give strong medicine used in treatment of seizures to their migraine patients. These are quite effective in treating migraines but have many ill effects like vomiting and hair loss.

Sometimes antihistamines can prevent migraines in children.

A few people have obtained relief from Botox treatment, but there has been no conclusive study on this subject yet.

Once you get a migraine, there is no way to treat it other than to let it wear off. However, an observant individual can prevent migraines when he notices the danger signals or triggers.

Lead a disciplined life with proper exercise for a healthy mind and a nutritious diet for a healthy body. Sleep well and at regular times. Try to rest for sometime during the day.

Many people develop their own techniques for battling their migraine. Some people just sleep it off in a quiet room, while others take a cold shower.

You might want to try eating ice cream as it can trigger the hypothalamus to give relief from the headache.

Disadvantages of some specific pain relievers include addiction. When taking medicine, you must be careful not to get addicted to the drug. These drugs include codeine, barbiturates and acetaminophen. They can also trigger headaches if taken too often. Of all the drugs discussed above, triptans are the most effective in migraine treatment. Several studies that compared the effects of various drugs have indicated this.

The individual must consult a doctor and start treatment immediately. It is necessary to consult a doctor as he can best judge your condition and prescribe the proper combination of drugs. You need to follow up with the doctor to see the effectiveness of the medicine. Some medicines or their dosage may need to be altered because of your body's particular response to them.

Moreover, a doctor is best qualified to check for complications and to warn you against the ill effects of specific drugs.

Self-prescription is not advisable as it results in ineffective treatment and the person's condition may worsen. Sometimes, it can lead to an error of judgment and cause death of the patient.

An intelligent individual must start his migraine headache treatment with a doctor as it will make him comfortable and aid the recovery process. A faster recovery means he can get back to his normal life and work. Therefore, proper treatment increases the productivity of the individual and minimizes the loss of work days due to absences caused by migraine attacks.

## Part-VII: Coping with Migraine headaches

### 40. The Impact of Migraine Headaches

Migraine headaches can cause immense suffering to the patient. He becomes very helpless during the attack. The person develops sensitivity to light and feels nauseous. He experiences a recurring headache on one side of the head. The migraine attack can last from a few minutes to a few days, during which they may totally incapacitate the person.

There may be far-reaching impacts from migraine headaches. The individual suffers pain during an attack. He has to take pain-relieving medicines so that the pain subsides and he gets some relief. However, long-term use of painkillers can cause ulcers in the stomach and abdominal bleeding.

They can fall into the habit of taking painkillers that become ineffective when taken over a long-term. Taking these palliatives may only worsen the situation as they induce pain rather than giving relief. Women with migraines who take contraceptives are at risk of suffering a stroke.

The migraine headache affects the health and general well-being of the sufferer:

- He has to spend money on migraine-relief medications.
- He has to visit the doctor periodically and pay the consultation fees.
- He spends many days confined at home, as he is unable to work properly with a migraine.
- His insurance providers bear the cost of the medication and hospitalization, in extreme cases.
- The numbers of lost workdays result in an economic loss to the company and his employers.

- Several detailed studies conducted in the US estimate the loss of working days by migraine sufferers runs into millions of dollars every year.
- A migraine sufferer who holds a demanding job will continue to attend office because of the stigma attached to absenteeism on health grounds. This aggravates his suffering and he may become irritable and suffer mental stress.
- Continued absences can lead to loss of challenging assignments and missing promotions. To tackle this problem the employers need to be sympathetic to the needs of a migraine sufferer. They must permit a flexible schedule for this individual when he suffers a migraine attack.

Migraine headaches upset the individual's lifestyle:

- He cannot live comfortably and perform his routine activities during these attacks.
- He cannot enjoy holidays and time with his family and children.
- Severe migraine headaches can adversely affect a person's relationships.
- This disruption causes depression and the individual has to alter his life. Hence, the family should adopt an understanding approach during these difficult times.

One person in the family, preferably their spouse, must be with the individual during these difficult times to give him the proper medicine and to take him to the doctor. The spouse may have to look after the children and the house along with her work at these times. However, patience and understanding can relieve some of the pressure. Friends and family workers must be compassionate during these difficult times, to help the sufferer cope with migraine attacks.

Children of a migraine victim may be confused and upset when they see their parent in such a helpless situation. The spouse must explain to the child that this

is a passing phase and things will be all right soon enough. Migraine headaches greatly affect the health and efficiency of an otherwise productive individual.

## 41. How to Cope with Migraine Headaches

A migraine headache can leave the patient devastated and weak for hours. It interrupts the person's normal life and makes him helpless as long as it lasts. It is important to recognize the signs of a migraine to cope with it well.

Many patients experience migraines when exposed to harsh sunlight. Others may develop migraines due to consumption of colas, caffeine, red wine and other foods that may trigger migraines. Patients experience a feeling of nausea, flashing lights, troubled sleep and heaviness on one side of the head. Some people experience a stomach pain during a migraine attack.

Unfortunately, there is no relief for migraines and prevention is the best remedy. Try to look for signs of an impending attack and keep away from the triggers. Observe your lifestyle carefully and establish connections between your food habits and the migraine attacks. Keep away from foods that contain MSG and nitric oxide as they bring about migraines.

Coping with Migraines may include sleeping off the headache in a dark, cool room. Some patients experience relief with a bout of vomiting.

Show patience and sympathy to a migraine sufferer as it renders the patient helpless. Repeated migraine attacks can cause depression in an individual.

It is good if the sufferer can discuss their feelings with a support group so that he can benefit from their counsel and share experiences for battling a migraine.

The best coping technique is to rest for some time daily and to consume healthy, nutritious food. Drink a lot of water and have regular sleeping and eating habits to avoid migraines.

This probably means adjusting your schedule, but migraine-free days make this exercise worthwhile.

Try not to over-exert yourself physically and avoid all types of mental stress. In acute cases, consult your doctor for appropriate medication that can bring relief.

A good way to tackle migraines is to keep a daily diary that records all your activities. You must record the frequency, intensity and symptoms in detail. This will help develop a co-relation between your actions and your migraines and help to reduce future episodes.

Coping with migraines in children is challenging since they may not be able to share all their feelings. You must rule out other neurological problems by consulting a doctor and getting the child to undergo the necessary medical tests. You can give the child mild headache medication and let him rest until the attack passes. Be attentive to the child and handle him with love until his suffering eases.

Coping with migraine headaches may require that the individual change his food habits and lifestyle. Someone that suffers migraines regularly must be alert for symptoms of an attack and take the proper precautions to help avoid them.

## 42. Myths and Misinformation about Migraine Headaches

There are various myths associated with migraines. Many sufferers do not seek professional medical help because of these myths.

The most common myth of a migraine is that it is just a bad headache. In reality, a migraine is actually a disease and your headache is just one of the symptoms of this disease. A migraine occurs due to nerve inflammation around the brain. The headache is due to the expansion of blood vessels supplying blood to brain.

A migraine occurs due to neurological disorder and not any psychological disorder. A physiological trigger causes vasodilatation of cranial blood vessels. This releases chemical substances or neurotransmitters, which is the main cause for your migraine.

Many do not take adequate care of their migraine, dismissing it as just an annoying problem which cannot lead to any severe outcomes. However, a migraine is a life threatening disease. It can lead to severe conditions like permanent visual loss, strokes, dental problems and even death.

Another myth is that any doctor can diagnose and detect your migraine problems and offer remedies. However, in reality, a migraine is very often misdiagnosed. Most doctors diagnose a migraine as a sinus-related headache and administer relevant medications. You do not get any relief and continue to suffer from a migraine.

## 43. Common Mistakes in Treating Migraine Headaches

Migraine headaches do not occur in isolation. Such headaches have many preludes like minor daily and less severe headaches. However, most doctors do not consider these preludes and offer treatment only for severe migraine headaches. This is a common mistake in migraine treatment.

Many times, patients do not realize they have migraine headaches. Physicians prescribe different OTC and sinus medications and antibiotics. Patients are not clear in expressing their discomfort while physicians do not give enough necessary importance to the prevalent symptoms.

Many migraine sufferers do not maintain any regular diary detailing the time, occurrence, severity and frequency of their migraine attacks. Despite various educational efforts, many do not record symptoms and effects of a migraine pain. Hence, they continue to suffer.

Many physicians do not offer migraine-specific therapy. Although these therapies are usually considered safe for migraine patients, physicians are not very forthcoming.

Statistically, heart attacks are a common occurrence for people between 55 and 65 years. Triptans, used in migraine therapy, can cause heart attacks. Therefore, fear of lawsuits prevents many physicians from prescribing such migraine therapy.

Most migraine sufferers refrain from using migraine-preventive therapy. Preventative therapy needs close and regulated monitoring. Prolonged use of such medications may cause various side-effects. Both physicians and patients have an equal responsibility to maintain a record or diary to note effectiveness of such therapy.

Physicians may conduct many detailed and unwanted diagnostic tests like EEG, MRI imaging, CT scan and others on patients with infrequent migraine symptoms and headaches.

## 44. When to Seek Professional Help

Headaches can cause havoc with your life. Many postpone their visit to the physician by adopting self-care measures. They delay the proper diagnosis of the cause of their headaches, and seeking remedial measures.

Migraines are persistent ailments. You need proper diagnosis and suitable treatment for relief from such pain. Many try over-the-counter medications like naproxen sodium, ibuprofen or aspirin for their headaches. However, if these do not offer relief within a day or two, consult your physician immediately.

Do not give aspirin to children below sixteen years old as it could cause greater problems including, possibly, a rare and fatal disease, Reye's syndrome.

If you suffer from regular headaches, maintain a diary to note their time, place, frequency, intensity, and other details of occurrence. This record helps your doctor diagnose and provide the correct treatment for your headache.

Sudden symptoms like a worsening headache after a head injury, a new type of headache, a change in your usual headache patterns, any headache accompanied by stiff neck, numbness, double vision, seizures, fever, weakness, mental confusion or trouble speaking need immediate medical attention.

Headaches with rashes, or after a recent sore throat or any respiratory infection also need prompt professional help.

Headaches may not always be a migraine or a serious condition but they are a common indicator of impending diseases and disorders. Therefore, seeking professional help immediately is essential.

## 45. How Do I Choose a Doctor for Headache Care?

Headaches occurring with a regular schedule and worsening over time need immediate medical attention. If the usual over-the-counter medications do not yield any relief within a day or so, consult your primary physician. Tell your symptoms and problems to your physician.

Additionally, you could inquire with your physician about his or her exposure to different types of headaches and their respective treatments. Get to know an approximate time for expecting results of your headache medications and if there is any need for visiting any headache-care specialist.

Normally, a physician needs to discuss your medical history, your lifestyle patterns and other possible causes (like diabetes or allergies) as possible triggers of your headache.

A detailed study of your body constitution is also necessary. If your primary physician prescribes headache remedies without going into details, it is best to consult a headache specialist.

A few more additional qualifications are also necessary for choosing your headache-care specialist. The physician needs to have a board certification with eligibility of a primary medical specialty and adequate experience in headache care. The physician should have experience in clinical practice, diagnosis, and headache care.

Research, teaching or writing expertise is also good. The physician could have a membership in the National Headache Foundation and/or the American Association for the Study of Headache signifying their special interest and knowledge of headache relief.

Their attendance at Continuing Medical Education (CME) courses on headaches is another qualification for choosing the doctor for your headache relief.

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