

Migraine Headaches

What are migraine headaches?

Over 28 million Americans suffer from migraine headaches. These headaches can last from hours to days, often exceeding the intensity expected of a headache. The exact cause of migraine headaches is unknown. Fortunately, there are medications and lifestyle modifications that can dramatically reduce the frequency and severity of these headaches.

Recommended lifestyle changes that can help decrease frequency and severity of migraine headaches:

- **Keep a regular daily schedule.** Get up at the same time, eat at the same times, and go to bed at the same time.
- **Eat a diet of fresh fruits and vegetables.** A health diet has been associated with decreased frequency of migraine headaches.
- **Daily exercise.**
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Most adults require 7-8 hours of sleep a night to function at their best, but some adults need significantly more than this.
- **Go decaf.** Caffeine constricts blood vessels and acts as a stimulant which can limit blood flow to the brain causing migraine headaches. Caffeine is also a very addictive substance which can lead to caffeine withdrawal headaches if you go too long without. Caffeine is also an ingredient in some headache medications, excessive use will lessen any potential medical benefit. It will simplify the assessment and treatment of headaches if you can totally eliminate caffeine from your daily routine.
- **Quit smoking.** Nicotine is a vasoconstrictor, which means it can limit blood flow to the brain, causing increasing headache and throbbing sensation. If you are not willing to quit entirely, cutting back can still be beneficial.
- **Control anxiety.** Uncontrolled anxiety can dramatically increase the frequency of migraine headaches and migraine headaches can worsen anxiety. If you feel like you are under a lot of stress or suffering from anxiety, talk to your doctor.
- **Take prescribed medications promptly.** When a headache hits, try to take the appropriate medications as soon as possible, apply a cold compress to the head, and try to lie down to sleep in a dark, quiet room (if possible).
- **Keep a headache journal.** Record the frequency of headaches and the circumstances surrounding them, such as what you have had to eat that day, stress level, caffeine intake, etc.

Potential Dietary Triggers for Migraine Headaches:

Chocolate	Pork	Tea	Coffee	Cola	Pepperoni
Pizza	Hotdogs	Bologna	Salami	Citrus	Alcohol
Vinegar	Sour Cream	Yogurt	Nuts	Peanut Butter	Coffeecake
Hot Fresh Bread	Donuts	Lima Beans	Navy Beans	Pea Pods	MSG
Onions	Chicken Livers	Bananas	Herring	Avocado	Canned Figs
Some Cheeses (Cheddar, Emmentaler, Gruyere, Stilton, Brie, Camembert)					

