

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

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Natural Solutions for Migraines

An occasional headache is an unpleasant nuisance, but a migraine brings everything to a screeching halt. While most remedies are drug-based, your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic has discovered a number of effective, natural solutions.

Do You Have Migraines?

First, the warning signs appear. Sometimes migraines are preceded by visual disturbances, known as “aura,” or tingling in one arm or leg. There is also often a deep ache beneath the eyes and forehead (*Pain Med* 2008; Epub). Then, throbbing pain, nausea, light sensitivity and vertigo ensue.

Migraines are generated by the contraction and dilation of blood vessels in the brain, perhaps due to fluctuating hormone levels. Newer theories indicate genetic factors.

According to the Chiropractic Resource Organization, at least 18 million women and 5 million men in the United States suffer from migraine headaches. One study blames female sex hormones, along with environmental and cultural factors, for the gender imbalance (*Med Hypotheses* 2008; Epub).

Your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic is using the latest research to



find the most effective strategies for each individual patient who endures this debilitating problem. From alleviating pain to prevention, your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic offers several drug-free options for migraine sufferers.

The Burden of Migraines

People who don't endure migraines may not understand the enormity of the problem. In Taiwan alone, migraines account for 3.7 million annual sick days, at an economic cost of at least \$4.6 billion (*J Chin Med Assoc* 2008;71:74-8).

Those with chronic migraines also experience a variety of related health issues. Along with special migraine drugs, migraineurs often take additional prescription medications, and suffer from a spectrum of gastrointestinal and psychiatric issues (*Headache* 2007;47:65-72).

Several studies suggest that this condition is seriously under- or misdiagnosed altogether. As a result, it's also undertreated, which leads to self-medication (*Headache* 2008;430-41).

Scientists took a look at one typical patient who had been freely treating himself. He used caffeine suppositories and ergotamine, a prescribed migraine preventive, but frequently ended up in the emergency room. Eventually his migraine trigger was correctly diagnosed as related to muscle spasm in the neck, which, when treated, helped break the cycle of pain



(*J Neurosci Nurs* 2007;39:213-6).

Limitations and Dangers of Migraine Drugs

Many diagnosed migraine sufferers turn to medication with potentially hazardous side effects. Prescriptions range widely and include barbiturates, narcotics, serotonin receptor agonists, beta blockers and anticonvulsants. But there are questions about the effectiveness of these drugs. Studies indicate that over the long term, they may actually make migraines worse. And they all harbor dangerous side effects.

Some migraine studies showed that up to 46 percent of participants had pain relief from what turned out to be the placebo (*J Pediatr* 2008;152:527-33). Because of this, nondrug treatments should be folded into every comprehensive plan that targets migraines (*J Am Osteopath Assoc* 2007;107:ES10-6).

Chiropractic Corrects Migraine Triggers

Chiropractors have long been aware that spinal conditions cause headaches, including episodic migraines (*JVSR* 2006;1-9).

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Specific spinal culprits include reduced neck mobility, forward head posture and the action of certain facial and occipital muscles (*Headache* 2007;47:662-72). Limited neck mobility and muscle injury are also associated (*J Orthop Sports Phys Ther* 2007;37:33-9).

Many types of headaches, including migraines, are accompanied by discomfort of the neck muscles (*Expert Rev Neurother* 2005;5:355-62). Specifically, fatigue in the neck flexor muscles appears to be tied to headache occurrence (*Eur J Pain* 2007;11:764).

In addition, if there is restricted movement in the neck, or if the spinal bones (vertebrae) in the area are slightly out of place — a common problem known as **vertebral subluxation** — nerves may become irritated and can induce a migraine.

Research shows that chiropractic care for vertebral subluxation has clear benefits for migraine sufferers whose migraines are related to dysfunction in the spine of the neck (cervical spine) (*J Manipulative Physiol Ther* 2007;30:408-18). Neck exercises also help to prevent this type of problem.

Research Shows Chiropractic Alleviates Migraines

Chiropractors and other health-care practitioners often recommend physical management of the neck problems that cause migraines. In an extensive analysis of clinical trials, Harvard Medical School researchers compared results for physical therapy, massage and other nondrug options as remedies for headache.

Outcomes showed that chiropractic adjustments helped with tension-type headaches that have migraine-like symptoms (*Headache* 2005;45:738-46). This type of care was found to be safe, with no serious adverse events, in a review of more than 19,000 patients (*Spine* 2007;32:2375-8).

Other Natural Solutions

Your doctor of chiropractic may recommend that, as an adjunct to chiropractic adjustments, you consider other natural approaches. These may

be particularly helpful for preventing migraines.

Acupuncture, for one, has been proven to be a genuine migraine cure (*Curr Treat Options Neurol* 2008;10:20-9).

Other alternative methods have met with some success. For example, in wet-cupping, a vacuum is created by placing a special cup over a superficial skin cut to draw out small amounts of blood. Wet-cupping may increase oxygen flow to a painful area, such as the neck.

In one analysis, this ancient Chinese technique was credited with reducing migraine severity by 66 percent. It also lowered the monthly number of “headache days” for test participants (*Am J Chin Med* 2008;36:37-44).



Hypnosis, relaxation, skin-warming, biofeedback, endurance training and physical therapy have also been shown to work.

Aromatherapy is also recommended, with applications of essential oils to the “pressure points” on the face and neck. Try oil of peppermint, marjoram and lavender.

Finally, doctors of chiropractic often suggest:

- ✓ Taking a warm bath or shower
- ✓ Resting in a dark room
- ✓ Applying a cold compress to the forehead or back of the neck
- ✓ Drinking fruit juice, especially tomato juice
- ✓ Massaging the face, head, neck and shoulders

Supplements for Headache Pain and Prevention

Your doctor of chiropractic may also suggest dietary supplements in conjunction with chiropractic care. For

example:

Feverfew: The herb feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*) reduces migraine pain and frequency.

Butterbur: Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) is thought to prevent migraines.

Magnesium: Some older studies have linked migraine incidence to magnesium deficiency. Supplementing with this naturally occurring mineral is still thought to help reduce severity and frequency of migraine events (*Headache* 2003;6:601-10).

5-Hydroxytryptophan: (5-HTP): 5-HTP is an amino acid compound produced by the body to help make two important neurotransmitters: serotonin and melatonin. Also available as a supplement made from *Griffonia simplicifolia*, 5-HTP may also prevent migraines, reduce their duration and lessen their overall impact.

Vitamin B3: While some people complain that niacin, or vitamin B3, sometimes causes facial flushing, it is exactly this mechanism that may relieve the blood flow disruption that brings on migraines.

Reishi: For some individuals, reishi mushroom applications work against headache pain.

Note: Always talk with your doctor before beginning any supplementation program.

Put an End to Migraine Misery

If you have migraines, don't wait for the sinking realization that your next headache is on its way. Empower yourself by talking to this chiropractic office immediately about a preventive care program.

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