

ARE YOU SUFFERING FROM MIGRAINES??

You are not alone. Approximately 20% of North Americans suffer from migraine headaches. The cause differs for each individual but essentially the pain that occurs is a result of rebound dilation of blood vessels in the head and brain due to brain nerve cell hyperactivity. For some people the cause is stress and tension in the neck. For others, migraines may be caused by food reactions, nutritional deficiencies, or hormone imbalances such as excess levels of estrogen. Naturopathic treatment options involve eliminating food sensitivities, stress reduction, and nutritional supplementation.

The foods most likely to trigger migraines are foods high in amines. These include chocolate, cheese, beer, and wine (especially red wine). These foods contain histamines and other compounds that cause blood vessels to expand. It is also crucial to eliminate food additives such as MSG, artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, and nitrates in cold meats and hotdogs. These foods may trigger brain cell hyperactivity. Caffeine, as well, should be eliminated as it causes the blood vessels in the brain to constrict. This may lead to rebound dilation, or in other words, a migraine headache. The withdrawal symptoms that occur from initially abstaining from caffeine can cause migraine headaches. So, it is best to wean off your coffee slowly, one step at a time, by reducing the amount you drink by one cup per week. Potential food sensitivities in each patient need to be explored. Often dairy and/or wheat are the culprits and once these foods are eliminated for a lengthened period of time, the body has time to heal and the migraines disappear.

The most common nutritional deficiency causing migraines is magnesium. Most people might think they are getting enough in a multivitamin or even in their calcium magnesium supplement but I find this is rarely the case. The form of magnesium is very important as well as the amount. Vitamin B2 (riboflavin) is also commonly deficient in people with migraines and the amount added in multivitamins is not sufficient for therapeutic effect to occur. The natural anti-inflammatory properties of fish oils are also often beneficial for those with migraines.

Stress levels for each patient also need to be evaluated. Stress causes our blood vessels to constrict leading to rebound dilation or a migraine headache. There are numerous studies showing the benefits of acupuncture on the reduction of migraine headaches. Acupuncture puts the body into a parasympathetic, or relaxed state which causes blood vessels to dilate. As a result, there is no more rebound dilation causing migraines, since the blood vessels are relaxed and dilated to begin with. Bowen Therapy, a hands-on therapy similar to acupuncture, works like acupuncture in reducing the body's reaction to stress, the frequency and intensity of migraines. Activities such as yoga, deep breathing exercises, and meditation are also extremely helpful.

Not all migraine headache cases may be straightforward to treat; however, naturopathic medicine has a lot to offer you, if you are ready to make significant changes to your diet and lifestyle.