

*WHAT, ANOTHER HEADACHE?

By Mike King

There are many types of headaches and they are divided into two main categories, muscular and vascular. Early in their training doctors are taught to categorize headaches further into major types: tension, migraine, cluster, sinus and hormonal or premenstrual. Muscular headaches involve tension headaches and are the most common, about 90% of all headaches. Vascular headaches involve the other major types and are about 10% of all headaches. Headaches have been called a “major plague” and an “unrecognized epidemic” by leading scientists and doctors. Millions of people all over the world are afflicted with this dreaded illness, although in the USA they are more common than anywhere else in the world effecting over 60 million people or nearly one forth of the population. Migraines are much more common in women and cluster headaches are more common in men. According to a recent study in WebMD Medical News more than 28 million American women get migraines, but only 3% to 5% seek preventative therapy.

The major causes of headaches are: allergies to foods and chemicals, non-allergic chemical sensitivity, structural defects and/or muscle tension, hormonal disorders, blood sugar disturbances, digestive disturbances, infections (such as colds and flu), stress, toxic exposure, and sinus infections. According to Dr. Cass Ingram in his book *Natural Cures for Headaches* he states that “the number one cause of migraine headaches is allergies” and “that alternative therapies for migraines exist and they are highly effective.” As early as 1913 two Frenchmen, Doctors Lense and Richet, proposed that food allergy was the likely culprit. Since the fifties there have been numerous studies and research findings to support the connection with food, food additives and chemicals with migraines. Some of the leading substances are: cheese, chocolate, red wine/sulfites, caffeine, eggs, corn, gluten, food dyes, tobacco, artificial sweeteners, artificial flavors, preservatives, mercury amalgam fillings, alcohol and MSG. Avoiding trigger substances and detoxing, especially with a good liver cleanse, can be quite beneficial.

Dr. Ingram states, the number two cause of migraines is hormonal disorders. Headaches related to drops in blood sugar are also hormonally induced. Migraines are the primary hormonally induced headaches. People whose migraines are manifested with pain behind the eyes are almost assuredly to have overworked pituitary glands. Hypothyroidism, or low functioning thyroid gland is a major consideration for females whose migraines occur prior to or during their menses. Chronic severe migraines, especially the types resistant to pain medicines, are likely related to adrenal gland dysfunction. Generally, specific changes in diet (such as avoiding junk food), nutritional support (especially a good “greens” supplement), and regular exercise can provide great benefit. L-tyrosine, an amino acid is not only good for glandular function, but also plays a role in individuals who are depressed, irritable, fatigued, and allergic.

According to Dr. Ingram, migraines and other headaches are curable. Determine the exact cause and get the correct therapy prescribed. There are six major categories of tests useful for evaluating migraines. These tests can be used to diagnose the majority of migraines (See sidebar). Fortunately, the most serious causes are rare, but there may be more than one factor causing the migraine so you may test positive in more than one of the migraine diagnostic tests categories.

Once you have determined the cause of your headache, there are a number of alternatives that you may want to consider. Many of these can be used in combination for a greater pain relief. Some of the leading non-invasive alternatives are chiropractic manipulation, massage therapy, and hot or cold packs. These are particularly effective for tension headaches and headaches due to injury, trigger points, and pinched nerves. Neurologist Dr. Harold Wolf concluded after many years of research that in the majority of headaches, pain arises from sensitive structures located superficially in the outer regions of the head and face. Relaxation, meditation, deep breathing, hydrotherapy, sound and/or music therapy, and aromatherapy can be quite helpful. According to Dr. Jack Hinze of The Infinity Center, lavender rubbed around the temples behind the ears and over the neck can relieve tension headaches. Eucalyptus and Wintergreen applied in the same manner is good for sinus headaches. For general headaches a combination of lavender, rosemary and peppermint is effective. There are also commercial rubs like Tigerbalm applied to the temples that can help stop migraines.

Two of the leading herbal remedies are feverfew and butterbur. These are especially effective for migraines and are best used preventively. Interestingly, there was a clinical study done on butterbur in which migraine patients took 75mg of butterbur root and cut their migraine frequency nearly in half. Oregano, ginger, licorice root, ginseng, kava kava, garlic, hops, rosemary, willow, meadowsweet, dandelion, juniper, wintergreen, valerian, California poppy Chinese and Ayurvedic herbs can also bring relief. These are powerful antioxidants, calming, circulatory enhancing and anti-inflammatory in action and are found in formulas like New Chapter's Headache Relief, Migra Zen Plus, or Manish Head Formula. Homeopathic derived preparations can be used in combination or singularly. There are even formulas with homeopathics plus herbs like Clear Migraine. Some of the leading homeopathic remedies are Aconitum, Arnica, Belladonna, Bryonia, Gelsemium, Kali Bi, and Nux Vomica.

Other things to consider for stress causing headaches are possible dental problems. Eyestrain from computer screens, fluorescent lights and even the TV can cause headaches. Increasing serotonin levels by supplementing with 5-HTP or L-tryptophan can prevent headaches, help you sleep, and even elevate your mood. Drinking or taking green tea can also be helpful. Don't forget to make sure you are getting proper vitamins and minerals. Calcium is great for preventing migraines, but huge doses may not be a good idea. A recent University of Tennessee study showed that 200mg of magnesium per day got rid of migraines in 80% of the women tested shortly after beginning the supplement. Chromium helps to reduce the length and severity of a migraines and even emotional stress headaches due to its blood sugar regulation. Although there is no scientific evidence that vitamins relieve migraines, a few vitamins play an exceptional role in migraine physiology. They are Pantothenic acid (for hormone related headaches), B-2 (riboflavin), B-6 (pyridoxine), vitamin C, and E. Essential fatty acids such as fish and flax oil help inflammation and provide essential nutrients to the nervous system. Researchers have found that during migraine crisis, fish oils lessen the severity by 50%. Early research at Albert Einstein College of Medicine suggests that 300mg daily of CoQ10 halved the incidence of migraines. Remember, as Dr. Ingram says, "Think positive, don't ever lose hope and soon you will find the cure!"

The 6 Major Migraine Test Categories:

1. Tests to rule out serious causes - Such as CAT scan, MRIs, brain scans, X-rays, EEGs, angiographs and certain blood tests.

2. Food allergy testing – done by specialized blood testing.
3. Vitamin/ Mineral assessment – through blood hair or urine analysis.
4. Digestive analysis – blood urine or stool assays.
5. Hormonal Gland Function – blood or urine analysis with historical and symptoms tests.
6. Toxic metal analysis – hair or tissue samples, occasionally blood and urine samples are used.

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