

## Expert forum



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This month Penny takes a look at the causes and cures for migraines



# Holistic Health check

## What is it?

Migraine is a neurological and often hereditary disease. The most prominent symptom is an intense pounding headache. During an attack blood vessels in the head enter into a repetitive cycle of extreme constriction followed by rapid dilation.

Migraines commonly occur for the first time between the ages of 20 and 40. Among female sufferers, about 65 per cent experience them immediately before, during or after their period. Half of all patients suffer from anxiety, and one in five experience depression. Most patients are perfectionists and are very hard on themselves.

## Classic migraine

A classic migraine typically occurs in the following sequence: An aura that may affect vision, hearing or smell precedes the headache. The most common aura symptom is an inability to see clearly, followed by seeing bright spots and zigzag patterns and there may be feelings of fatigue. A dull pain begins in one temple and spreads to the entire side of the head. It may be accompanied by vomiting.

## Common migraine

In a common migraine, the headache may occur without the preceding aura. The sufferer may have pale skin, bloodshot eyes and runny nose or eyes.

## What causes it?

- Migraine sufferers may be abnormally sensitive to the effects of physical and chemical factors that cause changes in the blood vessels. These can include chemical fumes in perfumes, cleaning products and gasoline.

- Excessive levels of oestrogen contribute to the amount of magnesium available to stabilise brain cell membranes.

- Supplemental oestrogen from oral contraceptive use or HRT can raise oestrogen to problematic levels.

- Low levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter, lead to a decrease in the pain threshold in patients with chronic headaches.

- Histamine, an inflammatory amine known for its production of cold-like allergy symptoms, also causes blood vessels to expand, thus acting as a migraine trigger.

- B6 deficiency caused by birth control pills, alcohol, food colouring agents and too much protein consumption can contribute.

- Tension – stress hormones constrict blood vessels.

- Food allergy/intolerances

## What can you do to prevent it?

- Eliminate all food allergens and follow a four day rotation diet. The diet should be low in meat and dairy products since these contain animal fats.

- Avoid foods containing additives, pickled and marinated foods, MSG and sweeteners

- Foods containing caffeine

- Foods high in amines: chocolate, cheese, beer, shellfish, beer and red wine

- Increase intake of flaxseed oil, cold-water fish such as salmon, garlic and onions.

- Use fresh ginger liberally.

- Do not miss meals. Missing meals may result in a less than optimal supply of glucose – a significant stressor for brain cells prone to hyperactivity.

- Stay out of bright sunlight or fluorescent lights that cause eyestrain. It may prove to be the final straw for hyperactive brain cells.

- Avoid constipation and treat the liver if it feels congested by eating plenty of bitter foods such as artichokes, rocket and endives.

- Make sure your body is hydrated by drinking at least a litre of pure water a day.

- Don't smoke.

## Herbs to try:

- Clinical trials found that feverfew was helpful for the prevention of headaches.

- 150mg of standardised herb should be taken one to two times a day.

- Butterbur has also proven to be an effective anti-inflammatory herb.

- Drink soothing teas such as chamomile, skullcap, lemon balm and lime blossom to aid digestion.