

# Self-Care for Migraine



People with migraine can do a lot to help manage their headaches. Awareness of factors that can affect headache may help you in reducing headache frequency and severity, as one aspect of your headache care. Below are some lifestyle measures to consider, which may be helpful for patients with migraine.

## 1. Sleep

- Keep to a regular schedule of sleep, going to bed at much the same time each night and getting up at much the same time each morning, whether it is a work day or the weekend. Avoid too much variability in your sleep habits, and aim to ensure good quality sleep;
- Avoid daytime naps;
- Avoid caffeine after 3 pm, as it will remain in your system at bedtime;
- Avoid alcohol. While you may fall asleep more easily, you will tend to have fragmented, poor quality sleep;
- Consider practising a relaxation technique before bed, to help wind-down for sleep;
- It can help to have a notepad by the bed to note any thoughts overnight, that way you know you can come back to them in the morning;
- Avoid using backlit screens (TV, laptops, iPads, mobile phones) for at least 1 hour before bed;
- Make your bed and bedroom as much associated with sleep as possible, avoid reading / working in bed.

## 2. Diet

While there are specific diets, such as the low tyramine diet, which have been shown to be of benefit in migraine, they may be very restrictive and hard to follow.

There are several simple things that you can do to help your headaches without being so restrictive. These include:

- Keeping blood sugars even by:
  - Eating regular meals (avoid skipping meals or running late for lunch)
  - Avoid excess simple sugars (cakes, biscuits, sugary drinks)
- Avoid dietary triggers that you have found routinely trigger your headaches. Common triggers may include: alcohol, chocolate, cheese (especially strong cheeses), citrus fruit, food additives (such as MSG), preserved meats, and sometimes soy products.

## 3. Hydration

Drink plenty of water, for most people 1.5 – 2 L daily, more if it is hot or you are exercising.

## 4. Caffeine

Avoid excess caffeine. More than about 1 (standard) cups of tea or coffee per day can worsen your headaches. If you drink more than this, consider gradually reducing your intake to prevent withdrawal headaches.

## 5. Exercise

- Regular exercise helps reduce many forms of pain, including headache.
- Walking is a good option, as people with migraine often find that any exercise that involves jumping or running may aggravate their headaches.
- During a migraine, exercise may worsen symptoms, so choose times to exercise that suit you best.
- Aim for 30-40 min, 3-4 times a week

## 6. Ergonomics & Environmental triggers

- Good workplace ergonomics, particularly with computer use, and regular 'mini-breaks' to stretch and rest eyes.
- Be aware of repeated activities involved with any hobbies. Activities such as bending over a table or over fine work, or painting ceilings for prolonged periods can also cause muscle strain around the head and neck and act as a headache trigger. Take regular breaks and remember to stretch. If possible, break activities up rather than doing one thing for a long period of time.
- Glare can be a trigger for a lot of people with migraine, so in summer it can help to wear sunglasses and a hat.
- Strong perfumes and cleaning products can also be a trigger, so if this is the case for you, try to avoid environments where this would affect you.

## 7. Relaxation

Regular use of a relaxation technique may help control headaches. This is particularly useful if stress is a trigger for the migraines. You should aim to incorporate relaxation practice into your routine, for example 20-30 minute 3-5 times a week.

You may need to explore a few options before finding one that feels comfortable. Some examples include: meditation, mindfulness, yoga, breathing techniques, progressive muscular relaxation. Biofeedback and CBT may also be helpful.

## 8. Supplements

- There is some evidence for supplements in clinical trials, and some people may find them helpful. These include: magnesium 400-600 mg daily, Riboflavin 400mg daily and CoQ10 150-300 mg daily.
- Please discuss any supplement use with your doctor to ensure this is a safe option for you.

## 9. Physical therapies

Massage, physiotherapy and acupuncture can be helpful in some people.