

A MIND-BODY APPROACH  
TO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

25

# Natural Ways to Relieve Headaches

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Including: Biofeedback • Exercise •  
Meditation • Massage • Acupressure

ROMY FOX

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# 25 Natural Ways to Relieve Headaches

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ROMY FOX

***Keats Publishing***

Chicago New York San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City  
Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto



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0-07-140274-8

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DOI: 10.1036/0071402748

To Barry and Nadine, without whom this book  
could not have been written

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# Introduction

The worst headache I ever had struck me in the middle of the night while I was at summer camp in 1979. I was a sixteen-year-old counselor-in-training, and that day's lesson had included an introductory course in wood chopping. Over and over again, I'd hefted the ax, sliding my hands up the handle as I dislodged the heavy head of the ax from a mangled piece of wood. Then, swinging it high over my head, I slid my hands down to the base of the ax handle and smashed the blade into another unlucky wood chunk. Slam . . . slam . . . slam. There was a rhythm to it, and I actually kind of enjoyed my wood-chopping lesson.

I don't remember getting a headache right away, but in the middle of the night I woke up with a real head banger, my own personal ax bashing away inside my skull. That wood chopping must have really jostled my brain! And not only was the pain excruciating, but I was also beginning to feel nauseous. In desperation, I woke up one of my fellow counselors who had some aspirin in her suitcase, even though we weren't allowed to have any kind of drugs in our possession.

"Marty, my head is killing me. Can I borrow some aspirin?"

Marty paused for a moment, then hissed back, "I can't give you any. I don't want to get in any trouble." Then, hard-hearted girl that she was, she rolled over and went back to sleep! Somehow I eventually managed to fall asleep myself, and miraculously, the headache was gone in the morning. But I'll never forget the desperation I felt as I lay awake in that dark cabin with my head about to burst, unable to do a single thing about it.

Anyone who has ever been plagued by severe headaches will understand the panicky feeling that takes hold when a viselike pressure grips your skull, pain stabs mercilessly above and behind your eyes, a dull ache partners with the sickly spread of nausea, and the throb-

bing of your brain seems to make your head swell and shrink with each heartbeat. Okay, I'll admit it—it's not the end of the world. Eventually the headache goes away. But sooner or later, it's baaack! And you're stuck with it, like an unwanted houseguest.

## AN OLD PROBLEM

Headaches have afflicted humanity since the days of the cave people, and we've sought a cure for them ever since. Some of the early “remedies” were a little extreme, to put it mildly. Archeologists have discovered skulls that date as far back as 7000 B.C. with large holes bored into them, a practice called *trepanning*. These holes were meant to be exit doors for the “evil spirits” that were thought to be cooped up in the head and causing the headache. Later cultures devised their own creative ways of dealing with headaches. The Greeks used electric shocks delivered by the torpedo fish (similar to the electric eel) and advocated vomiting as a way to get rid of evil deities that had supposedly invaded the body. In the ancient Mexican culture, a live frog or toad was applied to the painful part of the head. Native Americans chewed willow bark, which happens to contain a substance similar to aspirin. A popular early-American folk remedy for headache sufferers who don't mind strong smells calls for soaking a headband in apple cider vinegar and wrapping it around the head. And other cultures have used prayers and special chants to chase away headaches.

## YOU'RE NOT ALONE

It's not surprising that just about every culture has several headache remedies, since just about everybody—perhaps 90 percent of any given population—falls victim to a headache once in a while. For most people it's just a passing discomfort that disappears, thanks to aspirin, some other over-the-counter painkiller, or a good night's sleep.

But some forty to fifty million people suffer from chronic, debilitating headaches, and the everyday lives of many of these people can come to a screeching halt until the pain passes. Unfortunately, the problem seems to be getting even worse, with the prevalence of severe headaches increasing more than 60 percent in the last ten years. (Experts think this increase is probably due to poor diet, more environmental pollution, and greater amounts of stress.)

Headaches aren't just a painful problem for the individual; they also cost society plenty. Every year, Americans spend approximately \$300 million to treat headaches, and swallow more than \$4 billion worth of over-the-counter painkillers. Some 150 million workdays per year are lost to headaches, costing business and industry about \$50 billion in absenteeism and related expenses. Headaches also often interfere with family activities, bringing about resentment and anger on the part of family members, and guilt and despair on the part of the headache sufferer.

In spite of all of this, a great many victims of severe headache pain have managed to live productive and even extraordinary lives, including Thomas Jefferson, Ulysses S. Grant, Charles Darwin, Lewis Carroll, Edgar Allan Poe, and Virginia Woolf. How can you do the same? The answer lies in learning to control your headaches, instead of letting them control you. Although there is no "cure" for headaches, they *can* be managed through various techniques and lifestyle changes. I guarantee that you can add at least ten new ways to fight headache pain to your arsenal just by reading this book. But the very first thing you need to do is to put a face on the enemy by discovering which kinds of headaches are plaguing you. Only then can you create a plan to help stop your headaches in their tracks.

## **WHAT MAKES IT HURT SO MUCH?**

When you've got a headache, you can thank the network of nerves that covers your scalp and extends throughout your face, mouth, and

throat. Other headache-prone nerves are embedded in the muscles of your head and in the blood vessels that snake their way along the surface of your brain and congregate at its base. Every one of these nerves has a pain-sensitive ending that is stimulated by things like stress, muscle tension, and blood vessel dilation. The pain message is then rocketed to the brain, which takes careful note of where the pain originates and how much it hurts. About this time, you start rubbing your forehead and searching frantically for a bottle of aspirin. But, contrary to the way it may feel, the pain never emanates from the brain tissue itself or the skull, since they don't have the kind of nerves that respond to pain.

## TYPES OF HEADACHES

Believe it or not, there are almost 150 different diagnostic categories of headache. To make matters more confusing, you may have a headache that fulfills the requirements for more than one type, or your headache may change from one kind to another, sometimes right in the middle of an episode. In spite of these complicated scenarios, most headaches fall into one of three categories:

1. **Vascular headaches**, caused by either the narrowing or widening of the brain's blood vessels, or by neurotransmitter abnormalities
2. **Muscle contraction headaches**, due to tension
3. **Organic headaches**, due to various health problems

## Vascular Headaches

The term *vascular* refers to the blood vessels, and these throbbing, pulsating headaches result from the widening or narrowing of the blood vessels in the brain. The triggers that can either dilate or con-



strict the blood vessels and give birth to one of these miserable headaches include alcohol, smoking, drugs, certain components of food, exercise, and even sex. Whatever the cause, the blood vessels relax and widen unnaturally, then leak plasma (the fluid part of blood) into the surrounding tissues. That sets off alarm bells in the immune system, which sees the leaking plasma as the enemy and triggers the inflammation process. This, in turn, irritates the blood vessels, causing head pain with each pulsation of blood.

In migraine headaches, there's a dramatic prelude to all of this: The blood vessels begin the process by going into spasm and tightening up. This causes the flashing lights, zigzags, sparkles, and auras that many migraineurs see. Then the blood vessels widen (overcompensating for the earlier constriction) and start leaking plasma, and it's all downhill from there.

The most common pattern seen in migraines is this combination—the blood vessels clamp down and go into spasm, then widen, then close up, then widen again.

The best-known, most notorious member of the vascular headache family is the migraine, but, cluster headaches and exertion headaches are also included in this category.

## **Migraine Headaches**

The hallmarks of the migraine headache are nausea, tingling or numbness of the limbs, blurry vision, and a terrible, throbbing pain that's usually located on one side of the head (although it may switch sides). And the pain doesn't confine itself to the head; it often manages to take over the whole body.

The “classic” migraine headache has five distinct phases:

1. **Prodrome**—Within twenty-four hours of the attack, about half of migraineurs experience some sort of “warning” phase. There may be an increased sensitivity to light, noise, touch, or smell, as well as changes in mood (depression, irritability, euphoria, or increased or

decreased levels of energy). Problems with memory or speech may occur. The person also may experience neck or shoulder stiffness, drowsiness or yawning, speech problems, or a sudden craving for sweets. These symptoms probably indicate the beginning of slight upsets in brain activity.

2. **Aura**—Ten to thirty minutes before onset of the migraine, the person may see an *aura*—a hazy light accompanied by visual changes such as zigzagging, shimmering, or flashing patterns of light that may surround a blind spot. Objects might become distorted; sparkles or spots may also appear. Although much has been made about the migraine aura, only about 15 percent of migraineurs experience it.

3. **Headache**—Now comes the main event. The pounding, throbbing headache arrives and takes up residence in one side of the head. (In fact, the word *migraine* means “half a head.”) There it stays until it’s good and ready to leave, anywhere between four hours and three days later. During this time, the migraineur not only experiences a killer headache, but also feels downright ill—nauseated, dizzy, weak, and extremely sensitive to light, odors, and sounds. Vomiting, diarrhea, or both can occur. Often the only way to weather the attack is to lie down in a dark, quiet room until it passes.

4. **Resolution**—The headache usually subsides gradually with rest or sleep but can also end suddenly, as if out of the blue.

5. **Postdrome**—Once the headache disappears, the migraineur may feel wrung out, tired, achy, and emotionally unstable for up to twenty-four hours.

The typical migraineur is female, has a family history of migraines, and experiences her first attack before age thirty. Many experts believe that the favorite targets of migraines are perfectionists who are ambitious and driven. But oddly enough, these headaches strike most often when the pressure is off—during downtimes like weekends or vacations. The good news is that migraine headaches seem to ease up, in both intensity and number, as you grow older.

## **Cluster Headaches**

These headaches get their name because of their tendency to occur in groups or clusters. The cluster headache victim may be virtually headache free for long periods of time (perhaps years), then whammo; he's suddenly blindsided by several headaches a day for weeks or even months.

The exquisite, excruciating pain of a cluster headache has been described as intensely throbbing, burning, or skewering. The pain strikes with very little warning, often right behind one eye, making that eye swell, droop, and water. The adjacent nostril can become congested, and the same side of the face can become flushed or sweaty. The pain typically radiates from behind the eye to the temple, nose, jaw, chin, or even teeth. For many people, cluster headaches are seasonal occurrences, appearing in the spring, the fall, or both.

Although migraines and clusters are both caused by abnormal blood vessel reactions, cluster headaches are a horse of a different color:

- Stress or psychological factors are not usually the culprits behind cluster headaches.
- In contrast to the typical migraineur, the typical cluster headache victim is male.
- The body's own biological rhythms may be at least partially at fault.
- Nausea and vomiting rarely accompany a cluster headache.
- Cluster headaches don't appear to be hereditary.

Besides being male (six times more men than women suffer from cluster headaches), victims are usually heavy smokers who experience their first attack during their twenties or thirties. The headaches can appear several times a day for periods ranging from a couple of weeks to three or four months. Each episode can be relatively brief—as short as fifteen minutes—or might last for as long as three painful hours. And once in the throes of a cluster headache, the victim can become

hyperactive and agitated, pacing endlessly as he tries to figure out how in the world he's going to stop the pounding pain in his head.

## **Exertion Headaches**

Sometimes physical exertion can trigger a headache, but strenuous sports aren't the only perpetrators. Sexual intercourse, a coughing spell, laughing, or lifting a heavy load also can bring on an exertion headache. That's because all of these can cause the blood vessels to dilate and send extra blood to the head, which can result in sharp, throbbing head pain.

Exertion headaches can show up either in the middle of an activity or just afterward, when the dilated blood vessels suddenly constrict. Sometimes these headaches are so painful that the victim winds up in the emergency room. Luckily, they're usually not serious and will disappear with bed rest.

## **Causes of Vascular Headaches**

All vascular headaches have one thing in common: the dilation and/or constriction of the blood vessels. Either or both can be triggered by alcohol, certain food substances, exercise, cigarette smoke, and chemical imbalances, especially those involving the all-important neurotransmitter serotonin.

Serotonin is a brain protein that helps regulate hunger, sleep, mood, pain signals, and the diameter of the blood vessels. Some experts believe that the brains of migraineurs release excessive amounts of serotonin, which constrict the brain's blood vessels. This constriction is responsible for the zigzags, sparkles, and halos seen in the aura phase. Then, during the headache itself, the serotonin levels often come crashing down to the below-normal range. At this point, the blood vessels are free to relax and widen, and when they do, they begin to leak plasma (the liquid part of blood) into surrounding tissues, triggering the inflammation response. An unwanted "bonus" of extra-low serotonin levels is that the migraine sufferer feels the pain even more keenly. (By the way, if you're a female and are taking birth

control pills or having your menstrual period, your serotonin levels will automatically be lower than usual. Not surprisingly, if you have a tendency toward migraines, you'll suffer your worst attacks during these times.)

Another theory of vascular changes is that the trigeminal nerves, which are located inside the brain, transmit pain sensations from the face and head to the brain, which cause a release of chemicals that inflame the blood vessels. The irritated blood vessels then dilate and begin to leak plasma. Yet another idea is that low levels of magnesium can affect both serotonin levels and the size of the blood vessels, triggering inflammation.

## **Tension-Type Headaches**

Tension-type headaches, sometimes referred to as *muscle-contraction headaches*, are the kind that most of us get. A full 90 percent of all headaches are tension-type, often described as a “headband that keeps tightening;” a “vice around the head;” or a “steady, dull ache.” The tension-type headache often begins in the morning and gets worse as the day wears on. Common sites of pain include the forehead, sides of the head, and back of the neck—sometimes all three. Knotted, tender neck muscles are part of the package, and applying pressure on the headache site makes everything feel worse. There are two main kinds of tension-type headaches: episodic headaches, which happen spontaneously and last no more than a few hours, and chronic headaches, which occur every day or every other day for weeks or even years.

You've undoubtedly had at least one tension-type headache at some point in your life. You were either stressed, fatigued, or trying to keep a lid on your emotions (especially your anger), when suddenly your head began to pound like crazy. That's because the muscles in your scalp, face, and neck tightened up, putting painful pressure on their blood vessels and nerves. Eventually, you experienced a shortage of oxygen to those areas, and then your body released hormones that

made your nerves extra sensitive to pain. The unhappy result: you wound up with a headache.

A different theory of tension-type headaches holds that tense muscles cause biochemical changes in the brain, and these changes bring about the same reactions that occur in migraines (dilation of the blood vessels, leakage of plasma, inflammation, and so forth). A painful side effect of continual tension in the scalp, neck, and face is constantly irritated nerves, which can bring about a chronic daily headache. That can really put a damper on the quality of your life. Not surprisingly, victims of chronic tension-type headaches often experience anxiety, insomnia, depression, suicidal thoughts, and increased fatigue.

Adult women are the most likely victims of tension-type headaches, especially if they have family histories of headaches. The good news is that they lack some of the migraine's devastating side effects, such as nausea, vomiting, hypersensitivity to noise or lights, and increased pain with physical activity, and many of these headaches can be prevented.

## Organic Headaches

Organic headaches are triggered by some physiological upset in the body, anything from an inflamed nerve to a brain tumor. Luckily, only about 2 percent of headache sufferers actually have organic problems. Still, serious conditions or diseases can be an underlying factor in headaches, so if you've got chronic head pain, see your doctor to rule out the following conditions:

**High blood pressure**—Also known as hypertension, this “silent” disease often exhibits no symptoms other than a persistent headache, if that. A serious risk factor for heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure may be indicated by a dull, throbbing pain at the top of the

head. Luckily, it can usually be controlled through exercise, diet, and if necessary, medication.

**Sinus disease**—When the sinus cavities become infected, they fill with fluid, causing intense pressure and pain to the face and head, especially upon bending over. Sinus infections can usually be cleared up with antibiotics, although surgery may be necessary to clear a blocked sinus. Rarely will a persistent headache be caused by a sinus condition.

**Brain tumor**—This is probably your greatest fear if you've got chronic headaches, but less than 0.1 percent of headache sufferers actually have a brain tumor. Signs to watch for include changes in behavior, speech, or coordination.

**Brain hemorrhage**—Bleeding in the brain, whether the result of a ruptured blood vessel or an injury, is extremely serious. A sudden, intense headache will strike, accompanied by nausea, drowsiness, or both. Other signs of a brain bleed are slurred speech, a lack of coordination, and a loss of consciousness. Seek immediate medical care.

**Head injury**—If you get a severe headache during or immediately after physical exertion (strenuous sports, sexual intercourse, straining, and so forth), you're probably suffering from an exertion headache, which is usually no big deal. Even so, it's possible that the headache is a sign of an internal injury to the head, so see a doctor before you decide to ignore it.

**TMJ dysfunction**—If your pain originates in your jaw and radiates to your temples, the back of your head, and your neck or shoulders, your headaches may be caused (or made more severe) by a misaligned temporomandibular joint (the jaw joint, called TMJ for short). Grinding the teeth and tension in the jaw muscles are common reactions to stress and can lead to TMJ dysfunction, which, in turn, can manifest as head pain.

**Temporal arteritis**—A severe, throbbing headache can result from an inflammation of the arteries that pass across the temples. Temporal arteritis is an autoimmune disease, meaning the immune system

is attacking some of its own tissue. This condition usually occurs in those past the age of fifty.

**Post-herpetic neuralgia**—Pain in the head or face may be due to the infection of a facial nerve by the herpes zoster virus (a condition known as shingles). Luckily, the pain, inflammation, and depression that result from this condition can usually be treated successfully with drugs.

## THE HEADACHE CHECKLIST

To help determine the kind of headache that is plaguing you, put a check mark next to any of the following symptoms that seem to describe your condition. You may find that you get more than one kind of headache or suffer from a combined version. You'll need to see a doctor, of course, for a real diagnosis, but in the meantime, this checklist can help you zero in on the problem.

### Migraine Headache

- \_\_\_\_\_ Moderate to severe pain
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pain that usually settles on one side of the head
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pain best described as “throbbing” or “penetrating”
- \_\_\_\_\_ Usual duration of four to eight hours, but possibly several days
- \_\_\_\_\_ Visual disturbances (halos, sparkles, zigzags, or flashing lights)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sensitivity to noise and light during the headache
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nausea and vomiting with the head pain
- \_\_\_\_\_ Occurs during weekends, vacations, or other low-stress times
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dizziness
- \_\_\_\_\_ Numbness of the arm or part of the face



**Cluster Headache**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Excruciating pain
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pain best described as “piercing” or “burning”
- \_\_\_\_\_ Settling of pain behind one eye
- \_\_\_\_\_ Watering, swelling, and drooping of one eye
- \_\_\_\_\_ Congestion or runny nose on the affected side of the face
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sweating or flushing on the affected side of the face
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pain mostly on one side of the face, but possibly switching sides
- \_\_\_\_\_ Usual duration from thirty minutes to an hour
- \_\_\_\_\_ Several headaches occur in one day, with these groups of headaches occurring daily for weeks or even months
- \_\_\_\_\_ Onset of headaches occurs approximately the same time every year

**Tension-Type Headache**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Mild to moderate pain; a steady, dull ache that is not usually incapacitating
- \_\_\_\_\_ Knotted, tender, and painful muscles of the neck and shoulders
- \_\_\_\_\_ The feeling of a too-tight headband or a vise tightening across the forehead or temples
- \_\_\_\_\_ A gradual beginning and ending of the pain, rather than a sudden start or stop
- \_\_\_\_\_ Occurs during periods of stress
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lasts for several days
- \_\_\_\_\_ May begin during sleep
- \_\_\_\_\_ Often begins in the morning and worsens throughout the day

### **Exertion Headache**

- Pain begins with physical activity, coughing, laughing, or sexual activity

### **Organic Headache**

- Sudden onset of severe headaches, especially if you haven't had them before
- Worsening of pain over time
- Fever, neck stiffness, or face or jaw pain
- Confusion, slurred or loss of speech, drowsiness, or after sustaining a blow to the head (even weeks earlier)
- Clogged, inflamed sinuses

## **TREATMENT AND PREVENTION**

You may be surprised to learn that many of your headaches can be prevented. If you get chronic or severe headaches, pay a visit to your doctor to find out if your pain has some physical cause. Your doctor can perform tests ranging from blood pressure readings to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans to help pinpoint any serious problems. The doctor can also diagnose the kind of headaches that you get and will undoubtedly give you plenty of information about how to handle them.

Beware of over-reliance on medications, though. As you'll discover when reading this book, standard pain relievers (even supposedly safe, over-the-counter varieties) can backfire and make your problem worse. Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to work in concert with Mother Nature to ease your headache pain and, in the process, vastly improve the quality of your life. Read on to find out how.

# 1

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## Put Your Finger on the Headache Triggers

The most effective, super-duper, extra-strength headache pain reliever in the world can't hold a candle to my number one antiheadache strategy: *don't get a headache in the first place*. I know, I sound like a smart aleck, but you can save yourself a lot of agony by simply figuring out what triggers your headaches in the first place, then doing your best to eliminate or avoid them.

### HEADACHE TRIGGERS

Lots of things can trigger headaches; the list runs the gamut from monosodium glutamate (MSG) to carbon monoxide to a bad pillow. You have absolute control over some of these, like your intake of caffeine, while others, like menopause, will allow you less say in the matter. Your job will be to examine your habits and lifestyle, pinpoint various potential headache triggers, and try to determine whether they're the cause of your pain.

It's extremely unlikely that every headache activator listed in this chapter will be a trigger for you, but zeroing in on the ones discussed

here is a great place to start. Once you decide which are your most likely culprits, you can devise a plan to either eliminate them or tone down their effects. The chapters to come will help you with the latter approach.

But first, let's find out what's bringing on those rotten headaches.

## **Hormonal Factors**

For women, phases in the menstrual and life cycles bring changes in the levels of hormones, including estrogen. And these changes in estrogen levels, in turn, are sometimes associated with headaches. A woman who suffers from headaches should try to determine whether her headaches are more or less frequent during certain stages of the menstrual cycle, during pregnancy, while taking birth control pills, or after menopause.

## **PMS, Ovulation, Menstruation, and Menopause**

Many women find that their headaches worsen with premenstrual syndrome (PMS), ovulation, and menstruation. Most likely, these headaches are triggered by sudden, dramatic drops in estrogen levels, causing dilation of the blood vessels. Then, as estrogen levels fall during the years approaching menopause, this widening of the blood vessels can bring on hot flashes, in addition to headaches.

## **Birth Control Pills and Pregnancy**

Instead of causing a drop in estrogen, birth control pills and pregnancy bring about the opposite reaction: estrogen levels increase. But this may not bring an end to your headaches. High levels of estrogen encourage platelet aggregation (clumping of the blood cells), inflamed nerve endings, and blood vessel spasms, all of which make the chance of developing a headache more likely.

## Dietary Factors

Some people are sensitive to natural or artificial chemicals in the foods they eat and beverages they drink. Different people react to different substances, so keep a careful account of what you eat and drink and see how it correlates with the timing and intensity of your headaches. Later in the chapter, I'll show how to keep track of these patterns in a headache log. But first, let's take a look at some of the most notorious dietary causes of headaches.

### Alcohol

A powerful vasodilator (think of the bloodshot eyes, red nose, and flushed cheeks of a heavy drinker), alcohol initially causes blood vessels to widen. But the body counteracts these effects by clamping down on the vessels, which brings on headaches—especially cluster headaches. In addition, the additives or preservatives (sulfites) found in alcoholic drinks can be potent headache triggers. Surprisingly, the pounding headache associated with a hangover is most often due to impurities in the liquor, instead of the liquor itself.

### Amines

Amino acids are found in a wide range of foods, and these substances (dopamine, tryptamine, tyramine, and phenylethylamine) bring on headaches by constricting the blood vessels or activating other bodily chemicals. The biggest offender is tyramine, a building block of adrenaline and other bodily substances. An estimated 25 percent of migraines are caused by eating foods containing tyramine, which is found in aged cheese (cheddar, Gruyère, Brie, and so forth), red wine, beer and ale, yeast products, liver, pickled herring, sour cream, yogurt, soy sauce, and salad dressings. Phenylethylamine, another blood vessel constrictor, is found in chocolate and artificial sweeteners like aspartame.

## **Caffeine**

Although caffeine can be helpful in easing the pain of a migraine (it's a vasoconstrictor), if you overdo it, you can end up causing a headache. There are three reasons for this:

1. The blood vessels might become overly constricted.
2. Caffeine can cause a rebound headache. Taken day after day, two to three cups of drip coffee plus a couple of aspirin (or an equivalent amount of caffeine) can cause caffeine dependency. Over time, the caffeine will start to become less and less effective. Then, should you suddenly stop or drastically lower your intake, you might develop a caffeine withdrawal headache. This is the cause of many a weekend migraine. A person knocks back several cups of coffee every day at work, then has little or no coffee on the weekend. The blood vessels start to expand, and wham, a migraine hits. This phenomenon, known as a rebound headache, can also occur in response to overuse of medications like aspirin, ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or prescription vasoconstrictors (for example, ergotamine).
3. Too much caffeine can keep you awake at night. That's extra bad news for those with headaches, because a lack of sleep is a powerful headache inducer.

Sources of caffeine include coffee (especially the kind made by drip coffee makers), tea (especially black and oolong), soft drinks, chocolate, certain nonprescription drugs (including Excedrin, No-Doz, and Dexatrim), and certain prescription drugs (e.g., Cafergot, Darvon, Fiorinal).

## **Food Allergies or Sensitivities**

Although it's a relatively rare phenomenon, certain foods may make your immune system think that your body is being attacked by foreign invaders. Alarmed, your "army within" sends out the troops, causing a reaction that can include anything from hives to a headache. Often, the headache occurs in response to nasal or sinus congestion

that's brought on by the allergy. Some of the foods most likely to cause reactions include citrus fruits, corn, dairy products, eggs, and wheat.

Food allergies or sensitivities may also be linked to a poor diet in general. A diet high in preservatives, food additives, and other chemicals, for example, can make the body hypersensitive and more likely to react. And those who are undernourished—because, say, they're getting too much animal fat but too little fiber, vitamins, and minerals—can become more susceptible to a whole range of conditions, including hypersensitivity.

### **Food Additives**

The two biggest headache-causing food additives are nitrites—preservatives found in cured meats, hot dogs, bacon, and ham—and MSG, a flavor enhancer found in Chinese food, meat tenderizer, and a host of prepared and packaged foods. Nitrites are strong vasodilators, while MSG is a vasoconstrictor that can initiate migraines in certain people. You'll be able to tell whether or not a food contains nitrites just by reading the label (look for the words *sodium nitrite*, *sodium nitrate*, *potassium nitrite*, or *potassium nitrate*). The presence of MSG can be harder to spot. Keep an eye out for *hydrolyzed protein*, *sodium caseinate*, *yeast extract*, *texturized protein*, and *calcium caseinate*, all of which are “code words” for MSG.

### **Low Blood Sugar (Hypoglycemia)**

When you eat a sugary snack, such as a candy bar, your blood sugar will rise suddenly and dramatically. Your body will then release insulin to clear the excess sugar from the blood, but it may do “too good” a job, decreasing blood sugar to an unusually low level. As a result, you may find yourself light-headed, dizzy, shaky, and developing a doozy of a headache. Similar results can occur if you're hungry, especially if you fast or skip meals.

## **Environmental Factors**

Headache triggers are literally all around you—even in the very air you breathe. Weather conditions, pollution, allergens, flickering lights, and other elements of the indoor and outdoor environment can provide a fertile breeding ground for headaches. See if any of these sound familiar.

### **Weather Changes**

Some people get a headache when the weather changes. Differences in altitude, humidity, the amount of positive and negative charges in the air, and seasonal allergies may be enough to put your headaches into play.

### **Bright, Flickering Fluorescent Lights**

Do you work under these lights? These irritating lights can cause eye-strain and precipitate headaches, especially migraines.

### **Indoor Allergens**

Molds, fungi, yeast, algae, and dust mite droppings can instigate headaches in sensitive individuals. Cigarette smoke, including the secondhand variety, is a major cause of cluster headaches. Carbon monoxide, emissions from gas stoves, formaldehyde, moldy or dusty air emanating from forced-air heating systems, polyurethane, cleaning products, chemical solvents, perfumes, cosmetics, hair spray, and air fresheners all can be headache instigators.

### **Outdoor Pollutants**

Smog, especially car exhaust, is a virtual cocktail of noxious chemicals (including nitrogen dioxide, ground-level ozone, and benzene) that may bring on headaches. Other triggers may include insecticides, a water pollutant called trichloroethylene (TCE), and sulfur dioxide (a by-product of burning coal).



## Other Factors to Consider

Too much stress or engaging in certain repeated behaviors that stress the neck and spine, like sleeping on a bad pillow or mattress or grinding your teeth, can be the source of your headaches. Consider the following.

### Stress

The number-one cause of tension-type headaches is stress. In fact, stress plays a major role in the development of almost any kind of headache. When you're pressured, tired, or repressing emotions, the muscles in your scalp, face, and neck tighten up. If they stay that way for any length of time, painful pressure is exerted on the blood vessels and nerves, and you wind up with a headache. At the same time, stress causes vasoconstriction, increased blood pressure, and a release of biochemicals that can make your pain even more intense.

### Poor Posture

When your neck or back is out of line or subjected to constant strain (think typist, dentist, or house painter), the blood vessels in the neck and head can become either constricted or engorged, nerves can be irritated, and muscles can be strained. As a result, your head may begin pounding.

### Eyestrain

A headache that settles in the front of the head around the eyes may be the result of eyestrain. Common causes of eyestrain are poor lighting and vision problems. Too much time at the computer or in front of the TV also can cause eyestrain headaches.

### Grinding the Teeth

Many people grind their teeth when stressed or while sleeping. This tightens the scalp, face, and neck muscles and clamps down on blood vessels and nerves in the head and face. The painful result: headaches.

## **A Bad Pillow or Mattress**

Sleeping on a pillow or mattress that is either too firm or too soft accomplishes the same thing as poor posture. The awkward, unnatural sleeping position that results causes pressure on the blood vessels, nerve irritation, and muscle strain, all of which contribute to headaches.

## **Irregular Sleep Patterns**

It's easy to become overstressed when you don't get enough sleep. This causes certain biochemical reactions (i.e., an upset in serotonin production) and psychological reactions (irritability, depression, and so forth) that can lead to headaches. An extreme example of irregular sleeping patterns can be seen in people whose work shifts change radically, say, from daytime to graveyard shift. During such a change, people often get migraines while they're adjusting to their new sleeping schedule. On the other hand, sleeping too much (even just an extra half an hour) can instigate migraines in some people.

## **Exercise**

Strenuous physical activity causes the blood vessels to dilate to bring extra blood and fuel to working muscles. But this abrupt dilation also sends extra blood to the head. In susceptible people, this sudden increase in blood flow can result in sharp, throbbing head pain.

## **KEEP A HEADACHE LOG**

The best way to figure out what's triggering your headaches is to keep a detailed record of every headache you get for the next few months. Your log should include the following kinds of information:

- Date
- Time and date your headache started
- Time and date your headache ended

- Where you were when your headache started
- Severity (use a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being least and 10 being most)
- Location of the pain
- Other symptoms
- Possible triggers (stress, foods eaten recently, fatigue, and so forth)

After a while, you may notice a pattern. If your headaches typically occur on weekends, for example, you may be experiencing migraines due to a letdown in activity or rebound headaches due to caffeine withdrawal. Or perhaps your headaches occur only after you've spent a couple of hours at the computer or after eating mangos. Once you've zeroed in on the likely perpetrators, you're well on your way to stamping out headaches before they start.

Remember—you won't know what to change unless you know what's going wrong in the first place. Do take the time to complete a headache log every single day. What you learn about yourself and your headaches will be invaluable.

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# 2

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## Eliminate Headache Foods

I can well recall a hellish three-week period right after Christmas when I suddenly developed a headache that I just couldn't seem to shake. The headache, however, certainly managed to shake *me*. I couldn't sleep, eat much, concentrate, or work effectively—and forget having any fun. Even lying in a warm bath in a candlelit bathroom listening to my favorite music didn't bring me much relief. Because I was so miserable and not eating much, I decided that I should treat myself to whatever appealed to me. My sister had sent a big, beautiful double-sized crate of assorted citrus fruits from Florida for Christmas, and I had been slowly working my way through them. It got to the point where citrus fruit was just about the only food that sounded appetizing anymore, and I was eating at least three or four pieces a day.

After the third grueling week of my nonstop headache, my husband, Jack, asked, “So when did these really bad headaches begin?”

“Oh, right after Christmas, I guess,” I said, thinking back to the Christmas dinner that I barely touched. Then I stopped, horrified, when I realized that my headache had started the very same day we'd received that gorgeous crate of citrus fruit. Could it be? Was I allergic to (or at least intolerant of) citrus fruit, of all things? To make a

long story short, the answer was yes. Once I stopped eating the citrus fruit, that lingering headache disappeared.

## **FOOD ALLERGY VERSUS FOOD INTOLERANCE**

Lots of people assume that if a food provokes an unwanted reaction in their bodies, they are allergic to that food. True food allergies, however, are fairly rare. Here's what happens with a true food allergy. When the offending food is eaten, the immune system incorrectly identifies it as a "foreign invader" and sets out to wage war. The heart pounds; there may be shortness of breath; the throat may swell up, causing choking; and a skin rash or hives may erupt. Other signs of a food allergy include tremors, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, asthma attacks, and, of course, our good friend headaches. For those who are highly allergic, eating even a little bit of a particular food can produce a major allergic response that can lead to a potentially fatal condition called anaphylactic shock.

A food intolerance, on the other hand, usually produces much milder symptoms. Elevated blood pressure, stomach upsets, spasms of the airways, sweating, and headaches are all common signs of food intolerance, although it usually takes more than just a bite or two of the offending food to bring about these symptoms. If, for example, you can eat one or two strawberries with no problem but break out in a rash if you eat a pint of them, you've got a food intolerance.

Oddly enough, the foods that people eat most often or really crave can be the very foods that cause a reaction. This was certainly the case with my citrus fruit (darn it!). So, as you glance through the following list of the foods most likely to cause allergy or intolerance, pay particular attention to any that you crave, eat regularly, or consume in great quantities:

- Alcoholic beverages
- Caffeine

- Cheese
- Chocolate
- Citrus
- Corn and corn products
- Eggs
- Food additives and preservatives
- Processed meat and meat products
- Milk and milk products
- Nightshade plants (eggplant, peppers, potatoes, tomatoes)
- Peanuts
- Shellfish
- Soy products
- Sugar
- Tree nuts (walnuts, pecans, and so forth)
- Wheat and wheat products
- Yeast

The good news is that a food allergy or intolerance is rarely the cause of headaches. Much more often, a headache results from a reaction (although not an allergic reaction) to one or more food substances, such as certain amino acids or preservatives that trigger the widening of blood vessels in the brain. The bad news is that these substances occur in a wide variety of common foods.

## DIETARY TRIGGERS

The big four dietary triggers of headaches are alcohol, amines, caffeine, and the food additives MSG and nitrites. (For a more complete explanation, see Chapter 1.) Alcohol and nitrites are both vasodilators that can set the migraine process into motion. Caffeine, MSG, and the amines tyramine and phenylethylamine constrict blood vessels initially but can ultimately trigger excessive dilation. Whatever the reason, several foods that contain these substances are known headache

triggers and should be limited or avoided completely until you're sure they're not the source of your headaches. Nearly one-quarter of all migraine headaches are caused by eating one of more of the following foods. So, read this list carefully. Then copy it and tack it up on your refrigerator.

### **Foods to Avoid**

- Alcohol, especially red wine and beer
- Aged cheese (Brie, cheddar, Stilton, Camembert, Gouda, and so forth)
- Avocados
- Bananas, figs, raisins, red plums, or papayas
- Broad beans, fava beans, lima beans, snow peas
- Caffeine (in coffee, tea, soda, cocoa, chocolate, and so forth)
- Chicken liver, pâté
- Chocolate (contains caffeine and phenylethylamine)
- Citrus fruit
- Fermented, marinated, or pickled foods
- Foods containing MSG, i.e., meat tenderizer, soy sauce, seasoned salt, artificial bacon bits
- Herring, either pickled or dried
- NutraSweet (generic name: aspartame)
- Nuts, peanuts, peanut butter
- Onions
- Pizza
- Salty foods
- Smoked, cured, or preserved meats or fish containing nitrites (bologna, hot dogs, sausage, salami, pepperoni, bacon, ham, smoked fish, and so forth)
- Sour cream
- Sourdough bread or rolls

Does this list seem to include every food you've ever loved? Well, luckily, nobody is sensitive to every one of these foods. The trick is to find out which ones are causing your problems and banish them



from your life. But that will take some intensive detective work on your part.

## ELIMINATE THE ENEMY

The best way to find out if a food is causing your headaches is to stop eating it for a while and see if there's any improvement. Start by consuming a diet based on the foods that are the least likely to cause reactions: rice, fruits and vegetables (except those listed), and unprocessed meat or poultry. Then pick just one of the "forbidden foods" and gradually add it in small amounts to your diet. The introduction of a food should take place slowly over the course of a week or two, during which you watch carefully for reactions. Remember that you can have a delayed reaction; you may get a headache several hours after eating a particular food.

It's crucial that you keep a food diary so you can keep track of what you eat, when, how much, and which, if any, reactions occur. You may want to begin by keeping a diary of your normal food intake for a couple of weeks, noting when your headaches occur. This should help you determine which foods you'd like to test first during your elimination diet. Your diary will look much like your headache log and should include the following information:

- Date
- Time of each meal or snack
- Exactly what you ate and how much
- Description of symptoms that occurred within the next twenty-four hours
- Length of time a headache or other symptoms lasted
- Other notes, such as food combinations that caused symptoms, or anything else that seems significant

Then, once you begin your elimination diet, add a column titled "New Food" to your diary. Here, indicate which food and how much

of it you're slowly adding to your diet. Watch carefully for reactions, and write down the symptoms, severity, and time they occurred.

Unfortunately, following a true elimination diet and keeping careful records is hard work. You'll need to stick to it for several weeks or months if you want to get an accurate idea of which foods are causing symptoms. This will probably be harder than you imagine. Mixed or prepared foods can contain all kinds of hidden ingredients. Fast foods, frozen foods, and processed foods may make life easier, but you'll need to give them up for a while and prepare everything from scratch. You'll also need to be diligent about reading food labels and extremely careful if you eat out. To make matters more confusing, some foods may be tolerable unless eaten in certain amounts or in combination with other foods. (Your "Other Notes" column can become an invaluable source of information, if you keep complete and accurate records.)

Expect to become a bit of a Sherlock Holmes in your quest to discover the food sources of your headaches. It will be worth all the hassle once you finally pinpoint your triggers and eliminate them. Think of the pain, aggravation, and wasted days you'll prevent!

## **JUST ONE CAUTION . . .**

Because low blood sugar can bring on headaches, make sure you don't skip meals, fast, or go too long without eating. In the same vein, don't overdo it on sugary snacks, and when you do eat sugary foods, have something else with them. Your blood sugar will tend to skyrocket after a high-sugar binge, then come crashing down to abnormally low levels, possibly bringing along a headache in the bargain. Three meals (each containing some protein) and two or three snacks should help you maintain appropriate blood sugar levels throughout the day.

# 3

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## Purify Your Environment

Substances in food aren't the only "hidden" triggers of allergies or other reactions and their accompanying headaches. Tiny particles in the air may also bring on hypersensitivities that can put a head pounder into gear. Respiratory allergies, with their messy symptoms (sinus congestion, runny nose, watery eyes), can make your stuffed-up head start to pound. Dust, animal dander, humidity, molds, and cigarette smoke are major sources of allergies, and it's very likely that your home contains most (if not all) of them. Chemical sensitivity to toxic substances in the air or water (petrochemicals, formaldehyde, pesticides, and so forth) can bring on headaches resulting from chemical or metabolic stress. And constant exposure to noise, fumes, fragrance, or flickering fluorescent lights can overload your sensory equipment and make your head feel like it's ready to burst.

If you'd rather not devote your precious time to figuring out which environmental pollutant is driving you crazy, why not try to limit your exposure to the whole bunch? Then, at the very least, you and your family will be the beneficiaries of a cleaner, healthier environment. And at best, you may have fewer and milder headaches.

## BLOW OFF SMOKE!

If you smoke, you're making a major contribution toward the continuation of your headaches, particularly if you've got cluster headaches. And, migraineurs and those with tension headaches can succumb to a cigarette smoke-induced headache after as little as a sniff or two of secondhand smoke. Cigarette smoke causes blood vessels to constrict, and that alone may bring on a headache, or the blood vessels can overreact and end up dilating. Headaches can also result from exposure to one of the many potent chemicals or gases found in cigarette smoke, the most dangerous of which is carbon monoxide. Many migraineurs are extremely sensitive to carbon monoxide, which can seep into the environment not only through cigarette smoke, but also through automobile exhaust or a gas leak in the stove or furnace.

Smoking affects different people in different ways, but one thing we know for sure: it's terrible for your health. As much as possible, get cigarette smoke and its by-products out of your life now and forever:

- Stop smoking! Get professional help, use the patch, chew gum, do whatever you need to do. But get cigarettes, cigars, pipes, bongs, and any other smoke-producing items out of your mouth and out of your life.
- If you've got die-hard smokers in the house, insist that they smoke outside at all times. That won't stop you from inhaling the smoke on their breath, clothes, and hair, but it's a start. Ban all smoking in your home, car, and workplace.
- Stay out of public places that permit smoking, and if someone lights up nearby, remove yourself.
- While you're at it, just say no to incense, candles, wood-burning fireplaces, and anything else that generates smoke.
- Get your furnace and stove checked regularly for carbon monoxide leaks.

## PUT A DAMPER ON HUMIDITY

Many headache sufferers are extremely sensitive to the amount of humidity in the air. Why? Probably because humidity encourages the growth of mold, yeast, and algae—all potent allergy inducers. Some areas of your home, like the bathroom and the basement (especially in a house with poor soil drainage), are extra humid, making them perfect breeding grounds for allergens. Fortunately, you can take some simple steps to dehumidify your home and reduce the growth of allergens:

- If possible, open the windows and get some air into the house.
- In the bathroom, open the window or turn on an exhaust fan after showering or bathing to draw off the humidity.
- Use the exhaust fan above your kitchen stove to suck up the moist air that rises during cooking.
- Wipe down shower doors and walls.
- Fix dripping taps.
- Clean out or dispose of old musty papers and books.
- Avoid greenhouses, water beds, compost heaps, and climates high in humidity.
- Wipe down condensation on fish tanks, windows, and windowsills.
- Use a dehumidifier.
- If you see signs of black or green mold growth, scrub it away with a mixture of lavender essential oil and alcohol or, if need be, use 50 percent chlorine bleach and 50 percent water.
- Get your air-conditioning system cleaned, and have the vents checked for mold growth. Spores grow in these moist areas, then get blown around your house along with the cool air.
- Clean your refrigerator, indoor waste bins, countertops, shower curtain, and bathroom surfaces with antibacterial cleaning solution to keep mold to a minimum.

## DRIVE OUT DUST!

We are constantly surrounded by millions of little uninvited visitors, microscopic animals called *dust mites*, which burrow into our mattresses, pillows, carpets, upholstered furniture, drapes, and any other soft furnishings; chow down on dust; and breed millions more just like themselves. One of the worst allergens in existence, these little mites produce droppings that float in the air, and many of us develop allergic reactions when we inhale them. A single mattress may be home to as many as two million dust mites, and you unknowingly kick up clouds of dust mite droppings every time you walk across a carpet.

The best way to get rid of dust mites is to live free of fabric and other soft furnishings, but if that's not possible, you should at least try to keep the little critters in their place. There are several ways to do this:

- Buy special microporous covers for pillows and mattresses so dust mites and their droppings can't get in or out.
- Kill some of those that now exist by washing your bedding every week in the hottest water and adding a special "de-mite" solution to the wash.
- Wash drapes and curtains frequently.
- Avoid using down-filled blankets or feather pillows. (Dust mites love them!)
- Consider replacing venetian blinds or miniblinds with shades, which trap less dust.
- If you really have a problem with dust mite allergies, think about getting rid of your carpets and drapes in favor of hardwood floors and shades.
- Eliminate as much dust as possible from your home. Vacuum frequently (once a day, if necessary), using a microfiltration bag so the dust doesn't seep out of the vacuum and back into the environment.

- Use a moist cloth to dust tabletops, lamp shades, and furniture.
- Don't use the area under your bed for storage; it's a great way to trap dust, and you'll never want to vacuum underneath the bed because it's too much trouble to pull everything out!
- Consider buying an electrostatic filter for your heating system. Because so much dust is circulated via forced-air heating systems, it will be worth the money (anywhere from \$20 to \$100) and effort (you'll need to clean it once a month). But first make sure your system can accommodate this kind of filter.

## **PUT YOUR PETS OUTSIDE**

Dogs, cats, hamsters, birds, and other furry and winged creatures make wonderful pets. But allergies to animal dander (a mixture of skin scales, fur, and saliva) can cause a variety of symptoms, including headaches. If you can't bear the thought of parting with your pets, try moving them outside, if possible. At the very least, keep them out of your bedroom.

## **TAKE CARE WITH COSMETICS**

Let's face it: cosmetics are chemicals. They may make you look better, but they might also make you feel worse. Cut back on your cosmetic use, and refrain from using any that contain formaldehyde. Look for hypoallergenic forms, and use these whenever possible. Open the window when using hair spray, and try roll-on deodorant instead of the spray kind. Remember, products that contain perfume also have irritants that cause inflammation of the airways and

blocked sinuses. Always opt for the unscented variety, if you have a choice.

## **THE “ELIMINATION DIET” FOR HOUSEHOLD CLEANSERS**

Ironically, the very items you’re using to clean away allergens may, themselves, be causing allergies. Cleansers, detergents, sprays, polishes, scrubs, and the like are all loaded with chemicals that may be potent headache inducers. It may help to go on an “elimination diet” for household products. Use the blandest, most natural cleansers available: a paste made from baking soda and water for scrubbing, or a mixture of  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup white vinegar to 1 quart water to clean floors, countertops, mirrors, and windows. Use only the bland cleaning products for a while, then add one of your old favorite products and watch for reactions. Even better, stick with the natural cleansers for good.

If you aren’t the one who handles the housekeeping chores, ask the person who does to go on the “elimination diet.” After all, even if you don’t directly handle the stuff, it’s all around your house. Should that person continue to use the chemical versions, all of the resulting toxins will continue to permeate your clothes, carpet, furniture, linens, tubs, and counters. And you will never know which ones bother you and which ones don’t.

## **CLEAR THE AIR**

It’s not just the cleaning products that can cause problems: hair spray, air fresheners, soaps, aftershave, perfumes, cosmetics, moisturizers, and other common items may also be to blame. If your headaches are fairly new or have gotten worse or more frequent recently, ask your-



self if you've brought something new into the house, like a new sofa, new carpeting, or even newly dry-cleaned clothes. Chemicals found on new furniture, rugs, plastic toys, dry-cleaned clothes, and similar items waft their way into the environment as part of a process called outgassing. You may not smell the fumes, but there's a fair chance that those chemicals could be causing your headaches. If the weather is good and outdoor pollution is not a problem, open the windows wide to get some fresh air circulating in the house, especially if you think fumes may be causing your headaches.

An air filtration system is also a good investment for anyone with a propensity toward respiratory allergies. High-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters are the most efficient kind and can trap animal dander, dust, pollen, molds, and other substances.

## **WEATHER THE WEATHER**

You may be one of the unlucky people who gets a migraine in response to changes in the weather. A rise in humidity, a low-pressure front, winds, or sudden changes in temperature can all set your head a-pounding. Why? Some experts believe it's due to changes in atmospheric pressure or the concentration of ions in the air. Ions are atoms that have gained or lost an electron, giving each of them a positive or negative charge. The ratio of positive to negative ions changes along with the weather, often causing an increase in the positive kind. But positive ions tend to float around in the air, while negative ions like to stick to other airborne particles and cling to surfaces. You can think of negative ions as the "housekeeping" variety, because they attach themselves to positively charged particles in the air, then cling to other positively charged surfaces, like walls and tabletops. The result: less free-floating junk in the air for you to breathe. That makes life easier on your respiratory system, and you may be less likely to suffer an unwanted reaction (like a migraine).

If your headaches seem to be weather related, try using an air ionizer at home. Ions circulating in the air are filtered through the unit, given a negative charge, and then recirculated through the air to perform their “housekeeping” chores.

## **IS YOUR WORKPLACE SICKER THAN YOU ARE?**

Sometimes, your headaches can be caused by a combination of factors that you don’t even realize are present. Many newer office buildings are filled with almost imperceptible fumes from paints, varnishes, plastics, carpeting, fabric finishes, cleaning materials, and more. There may be pesticides in wallpaper, formaldehyde in the walls, molds in the carpets, dust mites burrowed into soft furnishings, and more. The problem is compounded by the fact that you can’t even open the windows in many of these buildings. Then there’s the air-conditioning and heating systems that keep recycling the same air, including the fumes rising from the carpets, walls, and furniture. Workers have no choice but to inhale this chemical soup all day long.

There may not be much you can do about a “sick building” itself, but you can make sure that you get outdoors during coffee breaks and lunch. You may also consider asking to be transferred to a work area that bothers you less—say, nearer a door that opens to the outside, or try purchasing a small air filter for your desk and see if that helps.

One of the best things you can do for your indoor environment is to bring in live plants. Researchers have found that the presence of several indoor plants can help sop up certain airborne toxins. For example, Boston ferns and spider plants can filter formaldehyde out of the air, while orchids can do the same for carbon dioxide. Other plants that help purify the air include chrysanthemums, aloe vera, African daisy, dragon plant, ficus, philodendron, poinsettia, and spathe flower.

## OUTDOOR POLLUTANTS

While your indoor environment may be somewhat controllable, there's not a lot you can do about what's going on outside. High pollen counts, car exhaust, sulfur dioxide from power plants, natural gas, pesticides, and a host of other things pollute our world, and for the most part, we just have to live with it all. Adopt a self-protective attitude. On days when air pollution, pollen, or other allergens are problematic, stay inside as much as possible. If you do go outside, avoid activities that require exertion. Keep the windows closed in your car and at home, and use the air conditioner in both places to filter the air you breathe. If you exercise outdoors, do so at night when pollution levels drop. Stay away from heavy-traffic areas when you work out, and wear a filter mask if you bicycle or jog on a busy street.

When you consider the sheer numbers of chemicals, pollutants, toxins, and natural allergens we're all exposed to on a daily basis, it seems incredible that all of us aren't a giant mass of allergic reactions. Luckily, you can do a lot to clean up your environment, and this should be a real priority for anyone who suffers from chronic headaches.

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# 4

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## Reduce Stress

Many years ago, I met an old man named Arthur, whom I now consider to be one of the wisest and most well-adjusted—albeit wackiest—guys I’ve ever known. I was working at the time as an elementary schoolteacher (one of my many incarnations), and Arthur was the school janitor. The other teachers privately called Arthur “The Shouter,” because at least a couple of times during every work shift, he’d take a five-minute break, go outside, and shout for joy while doing a little dance. He wasn’t obnoxious about it or overly loud. He just did a little dance and shouted, “I’m happy! I’m shouting for joy because the world is such a joyful place.”

At first, the other teachers raised their eyebrows and whispered among themselves when they witnessed Arthur’s little display of happiness. But after a while, everyone just took The Shouter in stride and didn’t pay much attention to him.

I had several long chats with Arthur during the year that I taught school. Because I was new to the teaching profession, I had a lot of preparation to do each night for the following day, and it just seemed easier to do it in my room at school. More often than not, I was still there when Arthur came by to clean up. Eventually I became comfortable enough around him to ask him why he did that little singing and dancing thing.

“Because life throws too many obstacles and difficulties at us,” he replied. “We go through life stretched to the limit, just like rubber bands waiting to snap. But when we dance and shout for joy, all our troubles melt away, even if it’s just for right now.”

I left teaching for good at the end of that year and never saw Arthur again. But even today, I often find myself thinking about the happy, wacky little man who took the time to dance and shout for joy and really enjoy the moment—even if it was just for a moment.

## STRESSED-OUT

When Arthur talked about being “stretched to the limit, just like a rubber band waiting to snap” he used the perfect metaphor for what it’s like to be under stress. Most of us are like rubber bands, endlessly pulled from both ends. We’re jolted awake at an ungodly hour by a blaring clock radio; we rush through breakfast; and nag, yell, and finally beg the kids to grab their stuff and get in the car. We hurry to drop them off at school, then crawl through maddeningly snarled traffic. Throughout the day, we’re subjected to project deadlines, demanding bosses, phones that won’t quit ringing, computers that freeze up, rude clerks, long lines, and on and on. But these things don’t qualify as stress, *per se*. Instead, they’re *stressors*, things that can trigger the stress response within us.

Stressors are, in a sense, the potential for stress. They don’t actually become the real thing until you respond to them by getting angry, flustered, embarrassed, desperate, and so forth. Then your bloodstream fills with high-voltage chemicals that prepare you either to fight or to run for your life. But 99 percent of the time, you don’t fight or run. Instead, you just stew in your own juices. Back in prehistoric times, you would have burned these chemicals off by battling grizzly bears or shinnying up a tree. But, in modern times, these powerful stress chemicals continue to course through your body unused,

wearing down your immune system, eating away at your organs, driving up your cholesterol levels, and otherwise damaging your body. Over time, the repeated triggering of the stress response makes you more likely to suffer from all kinds of health problems, including headaches.

The kicker is that the stress response is all for nothing. Getting all riled up hardly ever solves the problem; it just creates new problems inside of you. But let me tell you a little secret: you don't *have* to respond to these kinds of stressors. Most of the time, you can just ignore them or laugh them off.

## THE STRESS SHIELD

An estimated 90 percent of tension headaches are caused by stress, and it plays a significant part in bringing about most other kinds of headaches, as well. The solution, it would seem, is simple: cut back on stress, and you'll automatically cut back on your headache frequency and severity. How do you cut back on stress? By anticipating stressful situations and cutting them off at the pass. By prioritizing. By giving yourself a break. By stopping to smell the roses. Try these on for size:

- **Slow the pace of your life a little bit, and stop rushing everywhere.** Most of us are in a hurry because we fear we're going to miss something. Ironically, when we're in a rush, we miss practically everything. Give yourself more time to enjoy the things you do by scaling back the number of things you take on in the first place. Then take it easy, and enjoy.

- **Prioritize.** Figure out what's really important, and do that first. As for the rest of it—well, if you get to it, fine.

- **Spend time with people you really enjoy.** Get rid of friends who don't make you feel good. Life is too short. Instead, find people who are truly caring and supportive.

- **Remember that you're not Superman or Wonder Woman.** Stop trying to do everything. Instead, set manageable goals, break them up into smaller steps that you can tackle one at a time, and congratulate yourself as you make progress.

- **When you make a mistake—and everybody does—go easy on yourself.** Laugh about what happened, if you can. Then, take a break and try again. And while you're at it, go easy on others, too. They're no more perfect than you are.

- **Learn how to say no.** Remember, all areas of your life suffer when you're overwhelmed, so don't take on more responsibilities than you can handle with ease.

- **Ask for help when you need it.** Hire help, if need be.

- **Focus on the good things in life.** You may not be as rich as Bill Gates, but do you have a loving family? A nice home? Some fun friends? A great hobby? Revel in your blessings.

- **Exercise often.** It's the world's best stress reliever.

- **Make sure you get as much sleep as your body needs.** Fatigue invites the stress response.

- **Laugh often and much, especially during the bad times.** Laughter automatically lowers the stress quotient.

And while you're at it, why not try shouting and dancing for joy once in a while? You'll be surprised at how easy it is to get caught up in the sheer silliness of it—and just as surprised to find that your stressors have melted away as if by magic.



# 5

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## Biofeedback

Biofeedback is a way to learn to control what's going on inside your body. In fact, it literally means “body” (*bio*) “knowledge” (*feedback*). And, indeed, you can gain knowledge of your own body by using a biofeedback device to monitor certain involuntary body processes like heart rate, brain activity, muscle tension, blood flow, skin temperature, rate of digestion, and sweat gland activity. The device converts these bodily functions or responses into visual or auditory data, like a graph on the computer screen, a flash of light, the ringing of a bell, or some other cue. Then, by using a simple relaxation technique such as meditation, progressive relaxation, or visualization, you can actually see or hear the difference as you alter those bodily functions.

When you relax, for example, your muscle tension should decrease, your skin temperature might rise, your rate of digestion should speed up, and your sweat gland activity will lessen. The fun part (and the learning part) is that you can see or hear these changes, courtesy of the biofeedback machine. A graph line on the screen may climb higher or lower, a light may flash faster or slower, a temperature reading may rise or fall, a bell may ring more or less often than before. By using biofeedback techniques, not only will you know if a certain relaxation technique is working, but you'll also know how well it's working.

You'll also be able to improve your techniques because you'll know instantly what is and isn't effective.

## HEADACHE PRODUCERS THAT YOU CAN CONTROL

So what does this technique have to do with your headaches? Simply this: biofeedback can help you identify and modify three major producers of headaches: the stress response, the fear of pain, and (believe it or not) low finger temperatures. Once you've accomplished that, you should be able to prevent many headaches and nip others in the bud.

### The Stress Response

You know all about this one. Someone cuts you off in traffic, the anger seems to flood your body, your breathing becomes rapid and shallow, your face gets hot, and suddenly you've got more energy than you've had all day. Boy, would you like to punch that guy in the nose! The formal name for this hot-under-the-collar feeling is the *fight or flight response*. You feel like you could either run a four-minute mile or beat the tar out of Goliath. In reality, though, you can do neither—you're stuck inside your car on a crowded freeway. But powerful stress-related hormones have been released into your blood anyway, and because they aren't going to be used up by physical activity, they'll probably present you with a pounding headache instead.

### Fear of Pain

If you've got frequent or chronic pain, you probably already know that the fear of pain can often be worse than the pain itself. This fear can also make it settle in sooner or make the existing pain even worse. Think back to the last time you realized that another headache was coming on. You might have felt upset, angry, depressed, or oth-

erwise stressed as you thought about the pain that was about to bombard you and the wasted, unproductive hours or days that lay before you. You might have even grabbed your head and tightened your jaw as you moaned, “Oh, no. Not another one!” Unfortunately, this fear and frustration probably made your headache appear even faster and hit you harder than it would have if you had stayed calm and relaxed.

A lot of people end up on a medication merry-go-round because of their fear of pain. They take medication to ward off the beginnings of a headache, but as the medication wears off or the rebound effect sets in, they begin to panic. They quickly gobble down extra medication, setting the stage for more pain or a greater rebound effect in the future. More medication eventually equals more pain, which leads to greater anxiety, which calls for more medication. It’s like a hamster wheel that’s powered by medication and fear. And it can lead to chronic daily headaches.

## **Low Finger Temperature**

Funny as it may sound, most migraineurs have extra-cold hands and feet. While normal people have finger temperatures of about eighty-five degrees Fahrenheit, the finger temps of migraineurs are closer to seventy degrees. Because migraines are most likely the result of an inability of the blood vessels to properly control themselves (remember, they become unusually dilated or constricted), it’s not surprising that the blood vessels in migraineurs’ fingers may have similar trouble. Instead of widening, though, they tend to stay constricted—thus the icy fingers.

## **HOW BIOFEEDBACK HELPS CONTROL HEADACHES**

Biofeedback techniques for headache control are usually taught by psychologists, who tend to focus on reducing the stress response,

relaxing the muscles, and increasing the blood flow. Two kinds of feedback may be used: electromyograph (EMG), which monitors the electrical activity of the muscles, and thermal, which monitors the flow of blood and skin temperature.

## **EMG Biofeedback**

If muscle tension is a significant cause of your headaches (you tend to clench your jaw or tighten up the muscles of your face, neck, and shoulders in response to stress), EMG biofeedback may be just the thing for you. Sensors that identify muscle tension are placed on the skin directly over certain muscles, and the EMG biofeedback machine can tell you just how tense you really are in those areas. The psychologist will help you learn to relax and release the tension in those muscles, and you will practice these techniques while hooked up to the machine. Grasping the basics usually takes five to six sessions, but once you become aware of where your tension lies and how to relax those muscles, you can apply this knowledge anytime, anywhere.

EMG biofeedback may be particularly helpful for those who tense up in response to the fear of pain. Tightening the muscles (particularly in the neck and shoulders) causes constriction of the blood vessels, which in turn deprives those muscles of their full quota of oxygen and glucose. Waste products, like lactic acid, tend to build up and irritate nerve fibers, causing even more pain. But by becoming aware of the tension in your “stress” muscles and consciously relaxing them, you can often ward off a headache—and decrease overall pain levels. Once you realize that you do have some control over your pain, your fear of it should automatically decrease. An estimated 20 percent of headache sufferers benefit from the use of EMG biofeedback.

## Thermal Biofeedback

Thermal biofeedback is a real boon to those who suffer from migraine headaches. Studies have shown that as many as three out of four migraineurs can reduce the frequency of their headaches by at least 50 percent simply by practicing thermal biofeedback twice a day. In fact, thermal biofeedback is believed to be one of the most effective ways to prevent migraines that's currently available.

The idea behind thermal biofeedback is that by consciously redirecting the flow of blood to the finger and making its temperature rise, you can ease your body into a more relaxed state. The more relaxed you are, the warmer your finger temperature, so it's easy to gauge your level of relaxation. You don't need any fancy equipment for thermal biofeedback; a tiny finger thermometer is all that's essential. (Your psychologist will probably buy these in bulk for just pennies apiece.) You place the bulb of the thermometer on the pad of your index finger and hold it in place for a minute. Record the temperature, then tape the thermometer to your finger and find a comfortable position, either sitting or reclining. At this point, you should begin to practice some form of relaxation. You can listen to music or a relaxation tape, meditate, practice visualization, or just breathe deeply. You may want to visualize blood rushing to your fingertips or imagine warmth and heaviness spreading throughout your body all the way to your fingers. Your session should last at least twenty minutes.

When you're finished, check your finger temperature. If you've truly relaxed, the temperature should have increased. And next time you practice thermal biofeedback, it's likely that your beginning finger temperature will be higher than it was at the start of the previous session. With practice, you should be able to raise your finger temperature gradually just by visualizing the warming of the fingers. In the meantime, you will have altered your body's physiology toward greater relaxation.

## **DOES BIOFEEDBACK WORK?**

Research studies have confirmed that the vast majority of headache sufferers who get biofeedback training will experience at least some benefit. Many learn to prevent headaches, while others decrease their length and intensity. Powerful, safe, completely natural, and drug-free, this technique is a definite must-do for anyone with headaches.

## **FINDING A QUALIFIED BIOFEEDBACK PRACTITIONER**

For further information on biofeedback or to get referrals for a practitioner, contact the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback at 10200 West 44th Avenue, Suite 304, Wheatridge, Colorado 80033; phone 1-800-477-3392 or 303-422-8436; or visit their website, [aapb.org](http://aapb.org).

# 6

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## Inhale Oxygen

Inhaling oxygen is a remedy that's strictly for cluster headaches; it won't work for other types. Cluster headaches often start as a feeling of fullness in one ear, then evolve into a sharp pain that zaps the eye, cheek, or forehead as the blood vessels dilate and bring more blood to the head. In minutes, an excruciating pain settles in behind one eye or on one side of the head or face, then spreads throughout that side. Attacks of agonizing intensity can last between fifteen minutes and two hours, and often occur at the same time every day for weeks (usually in the middle of the night). Since cluster headaches involve dilation of the blood vessels, it's important to avoid anything that has vasodilating action, like alcohol (even a sip), foods that contain nitrites, exercise, stress, or sudden changes in temperature.

### **IT'S AN OXYGEN THING—SOMETIMES**

Why do some people get cluster headaches? Many researchers believe it has something to do with a lack of oxygen in the blood, since low levels of blood oxygen are common during cluster attacks. One theory holds that there's a malfunction of the chemoreceptors in the carotid arteries (arteries in the neck that bring the blood supply to

the brain). These chemoreceptors determine the blood oxygen levels, but if they're too stingy with the oxygen allotment (or too free with the carbon dioxide allotment), cluster headaches can occur. That's because the body may try to compensate for the lack of oxygen to the brain by sending more blood there. The result: an agonizing headache. A similar fate befalls some people when they travel to high altitudes, where the air has a lower oxygen content.

Smoking is notorious for decreasing the amount of oxygen in the blood, and possibly triggering headaches, especially cluster headaches. Indeed, most victims of cluster headaches are heavy smokers. Smoke eats up your air supply because it contains gases like carbon monoxide that, when inhaled, take up space on the oxygen-transporting "vehicles" in the blood. Neither oxygen nor carbon dioxide can float freely through the blood; they need a vehicle (a protein-iron compound called hemoglobin). But, only so many of these vehicles are available in the bloodstream. If carbon monoxide or other gases take up space on the hemoglobin, fewer oxygen molecules can get in the swim of things.

Lack of oxygen can also contribute to head pain in other ways. When the muscles in the head and face contract (a response to stress or pain), the amount of blood delivered to those muscles decreases. These oxygen-starved muscles have to get their nourishment through a different biochemical pathway, and the result is a buildup of a toxic by-product called lactic acid, the same stuff that makes your muscles sore after a heavy-duty workout. Other hormone-like chemicals also are released in response to a lack of blood oxygen, irritating nerve endings and increasing your headache pain.

## **OXYGEN TO THE RESCUE!**

The inhalation of 100 percent oxygen is considered a first-line treatment for cluster headaches, and it works like a charm in about 80 percent of the cases. You can rent an oxygen tank and a mask fairly



inexpensively from a medical supply store and keep them beside your bed for clusters that strike in the middle of the night. To administer oxygen, sit on the edge of your bed or in a chair and lean forward slightly. Put the mask over your nose and mouth, and inhale the oxygen at the rate of about 8 liters per minute. Continue inhaling for at least 15 to 20 minutes, longer if necessary, but limit your oxygen intake to a maximum of 1 hour per day.

Before using oxygen therapy, however, check with your doctor. Those with respiratory problems may not be candidates for this treatment.

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## Get Your Eyes and Teeth Checked

After suffering through years of frequent, moderate headaches, my friend Mona went on a crusade to find out what the heck was going wrong. Determined to leave no stone unturned (and no body part unprodded), she insisted that her doctor give her a head-to-toe examination, complete with blood tests, allergy tests, and even an MRI to rule out a brain tumor. Several weeks (and hundreds of dollars) later, the results were clear. There was absolutely nothing wrong with her. She was, as she put it, “perfectly healthy for someone who’s got a buzz saw going in her head.”

Soon after, Mona took her daughter in for a routine eye exam and, while she was there, decided to get her own eyes checked. (It had been years since she’d seen an eye doctor.) Sure enough, her vision had deteriorated and she needed glasses. And, lo and behold, as soon as she started wearing her new glasses, her headaches magically disappeared.

If you’ve got constant or recurring headaches, don’t overlook the obvious. Some headaches are the result of something as simple as the

wrong pair of glasses or too much jaw clenching. See your eye doctor and your dentist to make sure everything is shipshape in these important areas.

## THE EYES HAVE IT

Eyestrain is a common cause of headaches; all that squinting and straining overworks the delicate muscles around your eyes. It also adds to your stress levels as you try to force your eyes to focus. See your eye doctor to get your vision checked and to update your prescription, if necessary. You should also be tested for glaucoma (undue pressure inside the eyeball). Once your vision has been checked and corrected, see what you can do about the following vision-related headache triggers:

- **Make sure you always have sufficient light for your tasks.** Avoid squinting through a hazy light to make out letters, and don't read in a poorly lit area. Use a good desk lamp or overhead light for clear visibility, but avoid lights that are so powerful they glare.
- **Abolish flickering fluorescent lights.** Found in many offices, fluorescent lights can trigger headaches, especially migraines, in susceptible people (even when the flickering is imperceptible). If you can't get the management to change the lighting, bring a lamp to work that will provide your desk with a steady supply of incandescent light to counteract the effect of the fluorescent lights.
- **Avoid flashing lights, infrared light, and bright light (including sunlight) whenever possible.** These can also kick off headaches, as can light that bounces off a computer screen or copy machine. Wear high-quality sunglasses whenever you go outdoors. At the computer, lower the brightness, use a glare guard over the screen, rest your eyes by looking away regularly, and limit your computer time. Also make sure you close the lid to the copier whenever it's in use.

## ARMED TO THE TEETH

I clench my teeth when I'm stressed, and I grind them at night. Neither is a good idea, because clenching and grinding can cause or worsen headaches.

Tightening the jaw muscles (bruxism) puts pressure on the nerves and blood vessels serving the head, face, and scalp muscles, a primary cause of tension headaches. But that's not the only link between teeth and headaches. If the jaw assumes an unnatural position in order to accommodate teeth that don't fit together, the result might be tension and tension headaches. And some headaches are caused by a disorder of the temporomandibular joint (TMJ), a hinge joint that connects the skull to the jaw. The symptoms of TMJ disorder are jaw popping, jaw locking, and trouble opening or closing the jaw all the way. Although TMJ tends to be overdiagnosed as a cause of headaches, it is the culprit in certain cases.

See your dentist to find out if you've got bruxism, TMJ, or other problems with your teeth or jaw that might be contributing to your pain. The dentist can provide you with a bite guard to protect your teeth and help you break the teeth-clenching habit. This will involve making an impression of your mouth and creating a plastic covering for your teeth that you can wear at night.

Another kind of bite guard may be even more effective. Called the Aqualizer, it's made of a fluid-filled thermoplastic material that molds to the shape of your teeth in minutes. It's sort of like a very thin water bed mattress that sits between your upper and lower teeth. The layer of water "floats" your teeth so that uppers and lowers don't meet and your jaw doesn't have to take on a stressful position to make your teeth fit together. The force of your bite is perfectly distributed throughout your mouth. And because you simply can't clench your jaw with this plastic-coated layer of water sitting between your teeth, both jaw and face muscles relax. Relaxed muscles equal less tension, and that means less headaches. The Aqualizer is sold as an "instant headache splint." If your headaches result from tension in the jaw,

face, or scalp, the manufacturers suggest you pop the Aqualizer into your mouth at the first sign of head pain. By relaxing the muscles, it should nip a headache in the bud.

I discovered the Aqualizer at a health convention and managed to wangle a sample splint for myself. Being a world-class tooth grinder, and one who gets a headache the minute my stress quotient rises, I figured I was the perfect candidate to give it a test run. So the next time my head started aching (which was about an hour later), I popped the Aqualizer into my mouth and awaited the results. Sure enough, my headache melted away. One small problem: I looked really weird with that thing in my mouth. And forget about talking. But if you're at home alone or driving to work, who cares? It's a drug-free way to stop a headache in its tracks!

You might be able to get the Aqualizer from your dentist, or you can order a pack for yourself directly from the manufacturer. They come in packs of ten or twenty-five and cost slightly less than \$10 per splint. Contact Jumar Corporation at P.O. Box 5252, Carefree, Arizona 85377-5252; phone 1-800-HELP-TMD or 480-488-0881; or e-mail [aqualizer@aol.com](mailto:aqualizer@aol.com).

# 8

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## Improve Your Posture

Bad posture puts a lot of unwanted stress on the muscles of the head, neck, shoulders, and upper back. That's a given. Sometimes poor posture is a response to headache pain. Your head hurts, and your neck automatically tightens as your shoulder muscles draw up in an effort to keep your aching head from moving. Other times, your posture actually brings on the headache. You're hunched over your desk working, or lying in bed with your neck crunched forward so you can watch TV, and your neck, shoulders, and back tighten up like a vise. The result can be a throbbing headache, sometimes accompanied by a neck- or backache. And if you've already got a headache, stressed-out muscles in your head, neck, shoulders, or back can make it even worse.

### **MUSCLE TENSION AND HEADACHE PAIN**

When muscles are forced to contract for long periods of time, the pressure they exert on the blood vessels constricts the blood flow to that area. Tense muscles in the neck, for example, will eventually cause a lack of blood flow to the neck. That means less oxygen is

delivered to the muscles in question. But oxygen is necessary to produce fuel for the muscles, so in effect, muscles working overtime can actually begin to starve themselves because of the excess tension they create. The good news is that when oxygen supplies are low, the body can generate energy for the muscles in another way. The bad news is that this energy pathway produces a by-product called lactic acid, which tends to build up in the muscles, irritating them and making them contract even more tightly. The result is a vicious circle: tense muscles cause a lack of oxygen, which brings about lactic acid buildup, which causes even more muscle tension. That means pain—sometimes chronic pain—and if those muscles happen to be in your head, face, neck, or upper back, the pain can show up as a headache.

The two main sources of headache-producing muscle tension are stress, described in Chapter 4, and poor posture. Poor posture contributes to headaches by putting undue pressure on various nerves that serve the head, face, and neck, and by straining the muscles, tendons, or ligaments responsible for keeping your body erect. One of the major ways that poor posture contributes to muscle strain is by forcing the wrong muscles to do the work of holding up your head, neck, and back.

The body has two basic kinds of muscles: static and phasic. Static muscles help hold your body up, opposing the forces of gravity. They're designed to stay contracted for long periods of time without getting tired and are responsible for keeping your head, neck, and back erect. These muscles are situated in the neck, shoulder girdle, spine, and pelvis. You might think of them as the "posture muscles."

Phasic muscles are designed for strength and activity. They're responsible for movement—walking, running, lifting, stretching, and so forth. Although the phasic muscles are strong, they aren't meant to work for long periods of time. Unlike the static muscles, the phasic muscles are good only for the short haul; after that, they tire out.

Static muscles have a heavy workload that makes them prone to overuse and injury. After all, they are active during most, if not all,



of our waking hours. When the static muscles are overtired, the phasic muscles are forced to take over the job—a job they really can't handle. Remember, phasic muscles are good for short-term use only. They really can't maintain proper posture for hours on end. Postural imbalances result, and they can lead to pain in the neck, back, shoulders, or pelvis.

What does this mean for you and your headaches? You need to do whatever you can to make sure you're using your static, rather than your phasic, muscles to hold your body up. You can do that by making sure you're standing and sitting in ways that are friendly to your body.

## **CORRECT STANDING POSTURE**

When I was a teenager, my mother was always telling me to stand up straight, as she physically pulled my shoulders back and tried to get me to hold in my stomach. “Good posture makes a person so much more attractive,” she would tell me. What she didn't tell me was that it also makes a person less likely to have back trouble, knee problems, chronic tension in the shoulders, neck problems, and—you guessed it—headaches. Too bad I didn't learn my postural lessons back then, but it's never too late. Maybe it's time now for a second look at the rules of good posture.

### **Head and Neck**

Your head should sit right above the center of your torso with your ears straight above the midline of your shoulders (not pulled back or jutting forward). When looking straight forward, your eyes should be level with the horizon, and your chin should drop somewhat, so that it's not quite parallel to the floor. The back of your neck should curve in slightly, toward your Adam's apple.

## Shoulders and Chest

When your head is erect, your shoulders should line up with your ears, instead of rounding forward or being pinned back military-style. The tops of your shoulders should also be pressed downward slightly to lengthen your neck and minimize muscle tension from your neck to your shoulders. Your chest cavity should be expanded (not caved-in) and pulled up out of your torso slightly, so your upper torso is not pressing on the organs in your lower torso.

## Stomach and Lower Back

Your stomach muscles should be lightly contracted, your rear-end muscles tightened and tucked under, and the curve of your lower spine somewhat flattened. It may be easier to visualize by thinking of what you don't want: a "pooched-out" stomach, an exaggerated curve in the lower back (swayback), and rear-end muscles totally relaxed and sticking out in back. This is a classic recipe for back trouble, because the entire weight of the upper torso must be borne by the lower back. It's also bad for headaches because the stress caused by the swaybacked posture radiates all the way up to the head, encouraging round shoulders, a forward head and tension in the neck and shoulder muscles. But by contracting the stomach muscles, and tightening and scooping under the rear-end muscles, you can do a lot to improve your posture all the way up.

To learn how to engage these muscles, stand with your back against a wall so that your head, upper back, and heels are firmly pressed against the wall. Tighten your rear end, and scoop it under so that your lower back is almost flat against the wall. Then slide your hand between your back and the wall, palm against the wall. If you have the proper amount of lower-back curve, you'll have just enough room to slide your hand back and forth easily, while feeling your back and

the wall at the same time. (Here's a tip: a slight bend your knees will make it easier for you to flatten your lower back.)

## Knees

Your knees should be facing forward and slightly relaxed, not hyper-extended backward with your knees locked. When the backs of your knees curve outward toward the back, you're placing the bulk of your body weight squarely on your knees and your lower back. The thighs, rear-end, and stomach muscles (the very muscles that should be taking the brunt of your weight) are on vacation when you lock your knees, a position that encourages the swaybacked, stomach-out position. By keeping your knees just slightly bent at all times, you can ensure that your weight is more evenly distributed between your joints, muscles, and other supporting structures.

## CORRECT SITTING POSTURE

Because so many of us spend the bulk of our days sitting—at a desk, in front of a computer, in the car, at a restaurant, or in front of the TV—it's crucial that we learn to sit correctly, so our joints, muscles, and nerves will survive for seventy-plus years. Here are some guidelines for good posture while sitting:

- Sit up straight in your chair with your head erect, not jutting forward.
- Focus the eyes just slightly lower than straight ahead. (Adjust your computer screen if necessary.)
- Your shoulders should be relaxed and pulled back to your body's midline, just the way they are when you're standing with good posture.

- If you're using a computer keyboard or typewriter, your forearms should form a ninety-degree angle to your upper arms.
- Your thighs should be parallel to the floor.
- Your hip bones (rather than your tailbone) should bear the weight of your upper body. Scoot your rear end all the way back and let the chair support your lower back, while your muscles support your upper back, neck, and head. (If your chair doesn't have built-in support for your lower back, slip a rolled-up towel or cylinder-shaped pillow between your lower back and the back of the chair to help maintain your back's natural curve.)
- Your feet should be flat on the floor, forming a ninety-degree angle to the lower leg.

When you're sitting at a computer, the middle portion of the screen should be level with your eyes, while your forearms should form a ninety-degree angle to the keyboard. Many people don't have this setup. I know I didn't; it's impossible to achieve with a laptop computer (or so I thought). I solved the problem by getting a separate keyboard for my laptop, placing it on my desk's keyboard shelf, then propping up my laptop on books until it was at eye level. It's not a very portable setup, but fortunately I usually stay in one place! You can probably find some creative ways to make your own desk or workstation more conducive to good posture. By employing a few subtle changes, investing in some ergonomically correct equipment, or just reminding yourself to maintain good posture, you may be able to beat back or even eliminate a major cause of tension headaches.

# 9

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## Exercise

By now you know that stress is a headache sufferer's worst enemy. But did you know that the number-one way to combat stress is to exercise? Regular exercise is absolutely the best way in the world to reduce muscle tension, promote relaxation, increase circulation, lower levels of circulating stress hormones, enhance emotional health, and improve sleep quality. Exercise (particularly aerobic exercise) releases endorphins in the brain, powerful natural painkillers that ease pain and increase the feeling of well-being. Possibly because of this, regular aerobic exercise is known to decrease the frequency of migraine headaches. If you could invent a tonic that did all these things and also reduced body fat, revved up the immune system, and improved physical attractiveness, you'd be a multimillionaire. But you don't have to invent a tonic, because exercise is readily available to just about everybody—and it's free!

### EXERCISE BASICS

A good exercise program should include the following components:

- A short warm-up
- Some kind of aerobic exercise

- Strengthening exercises
- Stretching exercises to release tension and increase your flexibility
- A cooldown

For the warm-up, try doing some brisk walking, some easy jogging in place, some moderately paced cycling, or anything else that will increase your circulation and literally make your temperature start to rise. Within about ten minutes, you'll probably begin to break a sweat, a sign that your body is now warmed up. Warming up is vitally important as a way to guard against injuries. A big percentage of muscle sprains and strains occur because muscles are asked to work while they were still cold.

During the next part of your workout (the work phase), you should alternate between aerobic exercises one day and strengthening the next. You'll know an exercise is "aerobic" if it makes your heart beat faster and your breath come harder. Typical aerobic exercises include brisk walking, jogging, swimming, and cycling with sustained pedaling. Make sure you do your aerobic exercises three times a week for at least twenty minutes per session. Translation: take a brisk twenty-minute walk, swim, or bike ride every other day.

To help build muscle power and increase stamina, you'll need to do some strengthening exercises on the days you don't do aerobics. The key to strengthening exercises is resistance—your muscles will work against the force of some kind of weight, like barbells, the pulleys on an exercise machine, or even gravity itself as it pulls on your body. Your strengthening exercises should last for at least fifteen minutes per session—longer if you can handle it. But it's best to alternate strengthening exercises with aerobic so you don't overdo it and end up injuring yourself. And don't forget to give yourself one day off per week, for both mental and physical rest.

Flexibility exercises increase your ability to stretch, reach, twist, and bend and will increase or maintain your range of motion. They're

also great for promoting relaxation and a sense of inner calm. When you're stretching, remember these guidelines:

- Learn from an expert how to stretch correctly. Incorrect stretching can do more harm than good.
- Don't bounce while in the middle of a stretch. In other words, don't pull and release, pull and release in an effort to stretch further.
- Hold your stretch at your maximum position for at least thirty seconds to give your muscles a chance to adjust.
- Don't overstretch. If it hurts, ease up. Stretching should feel a little uncomfortable, perhaps, but shouldn't be painful.

The cooldown is similar to the warm-up, as you gently ease your body into another state, except this time, instead of revving your body up, you're shifting into a lower gear. You can do a slower, easier version of an aerobic exercise, like slow walking or easy cycling. And stretches should be a part of your cooldown, ending with the most-relaxing, least-strenuous ones. Whatever you do, don't end your exercise session when you're running at full bore, then go and sit down. Make your cooldown a gradual return to a resting state.

Following any good exercise program can improve your fitness and ease stress, both of which may help control or reduce your headaches. The trick is to find some kind of exercise that you'll actually do. Don't feel you've got to stick to one kind of exercise only (for example, jogging). You can work more muscle groups and keep your interest up by doing a mix of exercises (say, walking, cycling, Pilates, dance, and tennis). Whatever kinds of exercise you choose, do your best to make your workouts fun and interesting. You'll be more likely to stick with them if you do.

But, be careful. Exercising while in the throes of a headache can make your headache worse. Either wait until the headache has gone before engaging in strenuous exercise, or take it easy, doing some gen-

tle stretching or some mild walking or cycling. Stop if the pain increases.

For some people, exercise itself can bring on a headache. If this is a problem for you, exercise slowly and gently, paying particular attention to the warm-up. Skip the heavy-duty aerobic exercises, don't push too hard with the strengthening exercises, and if you start to feel a headache building, ease off and just do some mild stretches.

## **HEADACHE PREVENTION EXERCISES**

Tension and muscle strain in your neck, shoulders, and upper back are two of the most common causes of headaches. To make matters worse, once you get a headache, you're more likely to tense up these muscles so you don't jar your aching head. That adds to the muscle strain and increases your pain. Over time, your muscles can actually shorten and become chronically tired and stressed, making it more likely than ever that you'll get headaches. But by doing a few simple exercises every day, you can reduce tension and muscle strain in your neck, shoulders, and upper back, making headaches less likely.

### **Exercises to Correct a Forward Head**

These exercises help reposition a head that juts forward and puts a strain on the neck, possibly contributing to headaches.

#### **The Chicken**

Sit erect in a chair or on the floor, with your eyes straight ahead and chin parallel to the floor. Inhale and tuck your chin in as far as it goes, then exhale and push your chin forward, the way a bird does when it's walking. Repeat 5 times.



### **Soldier's Stance**

Standing or sitting tall, pull your shoulders back until your shoulder blades meet. Then, keeping your head erect and chin parallel to the floor, pull your head straight back, attempting to align your ears with the tops of your shoulders. Hold 5 to 10 seconds, and repeat at least 5 times.

## **Exercises to Relieve Neck Tension**

These exercises help reduce strain and tension in the neck, so common these days in those of us who spend the day reading, writing, or hunching over a computer.

### **Look Both Ways**

Sitting or standing erect and keeping your head level, slowly turn your face to the right as far as your neck will allow it to go, without overstraining. Hold it in that position for a count of 5. Then slowly rotate it back to the front and all the way to the left. Hold it there for a count of 5. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

### **Around the World**

Stand or sit with your head erect, back straight, and shoulders relaxed. Gently drop your head forward, placing your chin on your chest (if possible). Then slowly rotate your head toward the side, then toward the back, and then toward the other side, returning at last to the chin-on-the-chest position. Repeat 4 times to the right, then rotate 4 times to the left.

## **Exercises to Relieve Shoulder Tension**

Shoulders that are rounded forward or slightly raised create tension in the neck that can make headaches worse. The following exercises can help correct these habits and de-stress the muscles.

### **Shoulder Shrugs**

Sitting or standing tall with arms relaxed and hanging down at your sides, raise your shoulders until they touch your ears (or nearly so). Then pull your shoulder blades together and rotate your shoulders toward the back and down. Repeat at least 5 times.

### **Shoulder Pull-Back**

Stand or sit erect, fold your hands together, and place your folded hands under your chin, knuckle-side up. Keeping your chin parallel to the floor, squeeze your shoulder blades together, hold for a count of 5, then release. Repeat at least 5 times.

## **Exercises to Relieve Upper-Back Tension**

You know how good it feels when someone comes behind you and rubs the muscles in your upper back and shoulders? That's because we all carry a great deal of tension there, so these muscles are usually sore. Now you can get similar relief without having to bother anybody, by performing these exercises.

### **Trapezius Stretch**

Sitting or standing erect, turn your head to the right about halfway, so that your face is midway between facing front and looking all the way to your right. Place your right hand over the top of your head, and clasp the back of your head with your outstretched hand. Gently pull your head forward as far as you can, aiming to touch your chin to your chest. Hold for a count of 10, then release and gently bring your head to its starting position. Repeat on the left side.

### **Upper-Back Stretch**

Here's a good one to do at your desk after putting in some heavy-duty computer time. Sit up straight, extend your arms in front of you, and

fold your hands. Flip your folded hands so that your palms face away from your body and round your upper back. Gently roll your head down, attempting to touch your chin to your chest, and hold this position for a count of 20. Let your arms relax and your hands rest on your lap, then slowly roll your head up to starting position. Repeat as many times as you like.

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# 10

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## **Fight Headaches with Supplements**

It's no surprise that vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and hormones can help relieve headaches. After all, these ever-present substances play many roles in the body, participate in all aspects of biochemistry, and appear in literally every body cell. They can help alter the way the body deals with serotonin, a key substance in the migraine process; change the way the nervous system handles pain signals; and alter the balance of the body's own natural pain relievers. So let's take a closer look at what certain vitamins, minerals, and other substances may be able to do for you.

### **SUPPLEMENTS FOR HEADACHES**

Although there aren't any magic bullets, several supplements have been found to be very useful in relieving headaches. Among the most promising are certain B vitamins, vitamin C, various minerals, and a hormone called melatonin.

## **Thiamin (Vitamin B<sub>1</sub>)**

In a study published in 1986, sixty-nine headache sufferers who had not been helped by either pain pills or physical therapy were given 1 to 2 grams of vitamin B<sub>1</sub> either once or twice a day. A full 78 percent of them improved. Except for some reports of nausea, there were no side effects from taking the vitamin. Try taking a B-complex supplement daily that contains 100 milligrams of thiamin. But consult your doctor before taking larger doses.

## **Riboflavin (Vitamin B<sub>2</sub>)**

Migraine headaches may be at least partially due to a riboflavin deficiency, which shows up in the brain cells. Large doses of this vitamin (400 milligrams riboflavin, daily) may correct this deficiency and eliminate the headaches.

One study done in Belgium found that headache patients who took 400 milligrams of riboflavin daily for 3 months had 37 percent fewer headaches than those who did not.

## **Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> for Drug-Induced Pain and Histamine-Related Headaches**

Overuse of aspirin, drugs containing ergotamine, and other pain pills can cause what is known as a medication-induced chronic headache or rebound headache. These headaches develop because the medicines interfere with the body's ability to regulate pain. Taking vitamin B<sub>6</sub>—while simultaneously tapering off use of the troublesome drugs—helps control the head pain.

Histamine, the substance released in allergic or inflammatory reactions, also can play a role in headaches. The body makes histamine and then breaks it down. For some of us, the routine destruction of this substance is too slow, causing a buildup of histamine and possi-

bly the onset of headaches. Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> can help eliminate this problem. Take a B-complex supplement that contains at least 100 milligrams of B<sub>6</sub>, daily.

## **Vitamin C for Pain**

Several studies suggest that vitamin C reduces chronic pain. We don't yet know exactly why. However, we do know that vitamin C is a potent antioxidant and antistress vitamin that boosts general immune function. Safe doses ranges from 500 to 2,000 milligrams, daily.

## **Copper to Help Your Body Heal Itself**

We don't usually think about copper when discussing pain—in fact, we don't usually think of it at all. Still, this mineral may play a role in keeping enkephalin at healthy levels. (Enkephalins are part of our natural pain control mechanism, so we want plenty of them.) If your copper levels are low, boosting them to healthy levels may help your body regain its ability to control pain. Any good multimineral should provide adequate amounts of copper.

## **Magnesium for Headaches Related to Muscle Problems**

Magnesium isn't directly associated with headaches, but it may indirectly cause a real mule kick to the head. If you run short of magnesium, your muscles may begin to cramp, and that can trigger a host of problems, including headaches. If magnesium deficiency is your problem, increasing your intake of this mineral through diet or supplements may be the answer you've been searching for. Good sources of magnesium include leafy, green vegetables and nuts. A supplement containing 250 to 500 milligrams of magnesium, daily, may also be helpful.

## Melatonin

The hormone melatonin leapt to popularity in the 1990s as a sleep aid, but it can also help with headaches. Small studies, including at least one double-blind study, show that 10 milligrams of melatonin per day can help relieve cluster headaches. Start by taking 3 milligrams, daily, and consult your doctor before increasing the dose.

## SUPPLEMENTS SPECIFICALLY FOR MIGRAINES

Certain supplements may have particular benefits for migraine sufferers. They help the vascular system work properly and block some of the responses that can cause or worsen migraines.

### Thiamin (Vitamin B<sub>1</sub>)

Thiamin is able to mediate blood vessel changes, block certain nerve impulses, and do other things that can help reduce pain. In a German study of sixty-nine migraine patients, 64 percent responded favorably to treatment with vitamin B<sub>1</sub>.

### Riboflavin (Vitamin B<sub>2</sub>)

Riboflavin has many roles in the body, ranging from helping to release energy from food to aiding in the formation of red blood cells. Migraine headaches in some people may result from small deficiencies of riboflavin in the brain. If that's the problem, supplements of this vitamin should bring relief. In a 1994 study of migraineurs, riboflavin actually reduced the number of migraine days per month by more than half. However, the study did not include a placebo group, so the findings were questionable. That issue was settled in a 1998 trial involving fifty-five people with migraine headaches. The participants took either 400 milligrams of riboflavin or a placebo for



three months, and those who took the vitamin had an average of 37 percent fewer headaches.

## Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> for Hormone-Related Headaches

Although migraines strike children of both sexes fairly evenly, there are approximately three adult female migraineurs to every male. More than one in four women has a migraine headache at some point in her life, and chances are good that it's related to hormonal changes. Most of these attacks occur just slightly before, during, or slightly after the menstrual period. The first trimester of pregnancy seems to make migraines worse, while the second and third can show a marked decrease in attacks. Birth control pills can throw off the body's delicately balanced hormonal system and bring on headaches. One possible reason for migraines related to either birth control pills or the menstrual period is a deficiency of vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, which can interfere with nervous system function. By taking 100 milligrams of B<sub>6</sub> daily, you may be able to prevent these headaches.

## Vitamin C

A case history appearing in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1978 described how one man was helped by vitamin C. The thirty-two-year-old man, who had suffered from migraines for six years, believed that vitamin C kept his pain under control. But he couldn't tell whether the relief really came from the vitamin itself or from the placebo effect, in which case the taking of the vitamin relieved his pain simply because he thought it would. As a test, he had a researcher give him either the vitamin or a placebo in random order for fifteen days in a row. The test was double-blind, which means that neither he nor the researcher knew what he had taken on any given day until the end of the study. The results were intriguing. On the days that the man took vitamin C, his headaches were minor or nonexistent. But on the placebo days, they were severe.

## Calcium plus Vitamin D

Two different 1994 reports in the journal *Headache* detailed descriptions of four women who suffered from migraines. All four responded well when given supplements containing calcium plus vitamin D. A supplement containing at least 400 milligrams calcium and 400 I.U. vitamin D would be a good one to start with.

## Magnesium

One of the princes of migraine relief, the mineral magnesium plays a role in setting the threshold for attacks. In other words, it helps set the level at which pain appears. If you check the blood of people who are in the throes of a migraine, you'll find that their levels of ionized magnesium (a form of the mineral) are often low. This lack of ionized magnesium can cause spasms of the blood vessels in the head and changes in the way the body handles serotonin. Lowered magnesium can also bring on premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and menstrual migraines. All of this adds up to big trouble for people who are prone to migraines.

So, can giving additional magnesium solve the problem? Several studies have shown that this mineral does indeed have medicinal properties. For example, in one double-blind study, people with migraines took either a form of magnesium or a placebo every day for twelve weeks. Toward the end of the study, the people taking the magnesium enjoyed a 41 percent drop in frequency of migraines, compared to only a 16 percent drop in those taking the placebo. Generally, supplements containing 250 to 500 milligrams of magnesium daily are recommended.

## L-5-Hydroxytryptophan

The body uses L-5-hydroxytryptophan, a form of the amino acid tryptophan, to make serotonin. When given in supplement form, this

amino acid has helped migraine sufferers in several studies. In fact, in two double-blind studies, L-5-hydroxytryptophan was found to be as effective or almost as effective as standard medicines. The usual dose is 150 to 300 milligrams, daily, taken in divided doses.

## DLPA

In the early 1970s, researchers at Johns Hopkins University began a series of findings that led to the discovery that a simple amino acid could act as a powerful pain reliever. The amino acid relieves pain by “protecting” the endorphins, the body’s natural, built-in pain relievers. The body uses these morphinelike substances, much more powerful than our strongest pain drugs, to control chronic pain and keep background pain at bay. As is the case with other substances in the body, new endorphins are constantly produced, and old ones dismantled. But sometimes something goes wrong with the destroy-and-rebuild process, and the levels of this precious painkiller fall too low. When that happens, we can become prey to all sorts of aches and pains that otherwise might not bother us—including chronic headache pain.

Fortunately, there’s a way to restore lowered endorphin levels to normal, through the use of an amino acid named phenylalanine (pronounced “fennel-ala-neen”), or PA for short. PA acts as an endorphin shield, slowing the rate at which the body destroys endorphins. That helps endorphin levels rise and pain levels fall. In several studies, a dose of 300 to 600 milligrams of phenylalanine, taken one or more times a day, has successfully relieved several types of pain, including chronic headaches.

But not just any PA will do. Phenylalanine comes in two forms: “right-handed” (LPA) and “left-handed” (DPA). The two forms are mirror images of each other, as your right and left hands are. The studies that have garnered successful results have used either DPA or a fifty-fifty mix of DPA and LPA, called DLPA.

It's important to remember that DLPA works only on chronic pain, so if you're suffering from the occasional tension headache, this is not the answer for you. If you have chronic daily headaches, though, DLPA just might be a godsend.

My father-in-law, a doctor who has used DLPA successfully in his practice, recommends taking 375 milligrams of DLPA three times a day, with meals. If you don't get pain relief after three days of this, increase the dose to 750 milligrams. DLPA must be taken consistently, over a period of weeks, in order to give maximum results. You can't just pop a tablet and expect your headache to go away. Similarly, you shouldn't stop taking it once your headache disappears.

DLPA is available in vitamin and health food stores. Of course, you should see your doctor before self-medicating with DLPA.

Be cautious, however. People with the genetic disease called phenylketonuria (PKU) should not take DLPA, because they can't metabolize this amino acid properly. Anyone else on a phenylalanine-restricted diet should avoid DLPA, as should pregnant women, lactating women, and children.

# 11

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## Meditate

Here's a great thing you can do for your headaches: nothing. Zilch. Zip. Nada. Don't change anything, don't buy anything, and don't even think. Just do nothing. But you know what? Doing nothing is harder than you might think. If you're like me, you'll suddenly notice that the wallpaper doesn't quite match the couch and start fantasizing about new color schemes and fabric patterns. Thoughts will constantly whirl through your head, and that means that even if you're sitting still, doing nothing, you're still experiencing stress.

If you think of your body as a violin, your mind is the master musician. Your mind wants to make music all the time, applying bow to strings all day long (and sometimes all night, too), sometimes with a fast and furious beat, sometimes slowly and melodically. The mind doesn't like to rest; it wants action. But round-the-clock mind activity is stressful, and certain thoughts (those that are angry, frustrated, or unhappy) can increase your stress levels even more. And, as you know, the more stressed you are, the more likely you are to suffer from headaches. So it's a good idea to learn to clear your mind of all thoughts (happy or sad) for about twenty minutes, twice a day. That will do much to lower your stress levels and simultaneously reduce your odds of getting another headache.

Unfortunately, your mind doesn't come with a Cease Thinking button, so you'll have to learn and practice some techniques for quieting your mind. The most popular way of doing that is meditation. Practiced in many forms, meditation is an ancient technique that helps you ratchet down the speed and volume of the thought flow in your head, giving your mind a much-needed rest. Typically, meditation is performed by focusing strongly on a word, phrase, or object while gently ignoring all the other thoughts that may come up. In the beginning, your mind will seem to be constantly reverting to its "thinking mode." But with practice, you'll soon notice a decline in the number of thoughts that pop up, and you'll feel less compelled to pay attention to them.

Over time, you'll find yourself becoming more and more relaxed as you meditate. And the peace and relaxation you'll discover while meditating will carry over into your active life, helping you deal more calmly and rationally with daily stressors. Eventually you'll find that you can tap into that well of mental and physical calm no matter what tempests swirl about you. Just this can be a powerful deterrent to a headache-in-the-making.

## HOW TO MEDITATE

There are numerous schools of meditation, from transcendental meditation to *qi gong* (described in the next chapter). Some are "moving meditations" such as Buddhist mindfulness, yoga, and tai chi. Prayer can also be used meditatively (rosary beads have long been considered a form of meditation), and more deliberate form of meditation is programmed relaxation. One kind of meditation is not necessarily superior to any other. The best one is the one that works best for you.

Depending on the style of meditation that you choose, you can begin by standing up, lying down, sitting erect on a mat on the floor, or assuming a specific pose. Once you're comfortable, you'll begin to focus on something other than your thoughts. It may be the rhythm

of your breathing, an image in your mind, an object like a candle flame or a colored gem, or a word or phrase called a mantra. If you use a mantra, it may be given to you by your teacher or selected by you yourself, and may have religious or spiritual significance or be nonsensical. You may be instructed to repeat the mantra out loud as you meditate or to repeat it silently, over and over again, in your mind.

When stray thoughts creep in and threaten to interrupt your concentration, don't worry about them. Don't make an effort to stop them, since that requires activation of your mind. Instead, acknowledge that those thoughts exist and gently bring your attention back to your focal point. The same goes for any noise or other disruptions in your environment. Know they're there, then return your focus to your breath, the image, or the mantra.

There's no set schedule for meditating, but two sessions per day, fifteen to twenty minutes each, are generally recommended. Find a place where you can be alone and won't be interrupted, and dedicate that time to quieting and calming your mind. And don't feel that you can't meditate unless you have a full twenty minutes to spare. Even five or ten minutes of meditation is beneficial.

## **DOES IT WORK?**

There's no doubt that meditation works. Numerous studies show that it greatly increases muscle relaxation, lowers the heart rate, helps reduce high blood pressure, and decreases the circulating levels of stress-linked chemicals and hormones. Meditation is also an effective method of interrupting the stress-headache cycle, calming an overly stimulated nervous system, and balancing the metabolism of serotonin (the hormone responsible for a feeling of well-being). In addition, studies of people suffering from chronic pain, including headaches, suggest that meditation is very helpful in short-circuiting the stress-pain cycle that traps so many people.

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# 12

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## Qi Gong

According to *The Yellow Emperor's Classic on Internal Medicine*, an ancient Chinese text written some four thousand years ago, most people survive for only half of their potential life span. Why? According to the book, the main reason is that they don't cherish and nourish their internal energy, their *qi* (pronounced "chee" and often spelled chi). Qi is the life energy, the internal force that animates us and makes us living beings. We get our "starter kit" of qi from our parents—a finite amount of life energy that slowly dwindles as the years pass. We also get qi by eating food and breathing air, both of which replenish our supply of life energy. According to traditional Chinese medicine, if we have an ample supply of qi, and if it is circulating freely throughout our bodies, we won't become ill. Without an adequate supply, illness, disability, and death can be the unhappy results.

In an effort to avoid illness, ancient Chinese healers devised qi gong, a system of movement, meditation, and breathing designed to increase and maintain the qi. *Gong* (pronounced "gung") means "work," so *qi gong* means "working with the life energy." Qi gong was not designed to treat disease, but to prevent it from occurring in the first place.

There are two kinds of qi gong: the internal kind, in which you work to increase your own supply of qi and keep it flowing freely,

and the external kind, in which qi is transferred to you from another person. Internal qi gong involves the practice of movements that are something like tai chi (although less complex), plus meditation and breathing exercises. External qi gong involves trained healers who use various techniques, such as passing their hands over your body, to transfer energy to you and free up any energy blockages in your body. Styles of qi gong are numerous, and each one has its own interpretation of body movement, meditation, and breathing. The style you choose is mostly a matter of personal preference, since no single set of exercises or form of meditation is more “correct” than any other. What makes it right is that it feels right to you.

## BENEFITS OF QI GONG

Although some champions of qi gong claim it can diminish or even cure just about any disease, the aim of this healing art is to keep the life energy flowing freely throughout the body. Think of qi as you would blood. We need a certain minimum amount of blood to be healthy. If there isn't enough blood circulating through our arteries and veins, we don't feel good. And even if we do have enough blood, if an artery becomes blocked and the blood can't flow freely to a certain part of the body, that part will sicken or even die. Just as we need blood coursing through our veins, we need qi flowing freely along its invisible body channels, known as the *meridians*. Qi gong is designed to help remove blockages in the qi and restore optimum circulation of the life force.

Qi gong may also help to ward off or relieve stress-related illnesses. The simple movements, breathing exercises, and meditation are all designed to take you out of yourself for at least twenty minutes a day. Meditation, as explained in Chapter 11, has long been recommended as a way to decompress and reduce or relieve stress.

You'll get several benefits from the practice of qi gong, either during or after the sessions. The overall result is often a decline in heart rate, reduced blood pressure, increased circulation of lymphatic fluid, and the release of endorphins (the body's natural painkillers). Qi gong also improves physical conditioning, strengthens the body, and increases flexibility and balance. Proponents of this healing art insist that it can also speed the recovery from illness or surgery, boost the immune system, reduce pain and swelling due to injury, regulate hormones, and help you adjust more quickly to changes in the weather.

## LEARNING QI GONG

The best way to learn qi gong is to work with an experienced instructor who will teach you the various movements, meditations, and breathing exercises. Both private lessons and group classes work well. A typical training or practice session may begin with a standing meditation, then move on to various movements incorporating deep breathing, and end up with more meditation. As you become more practiced, you'll be able to keep your meditative state right through an entire series of exercises. The session will become, in effect, one long meditation.

The exercises are many and varied, and differ somewhat from style to style. Some are done standing; others may be performed sitting or even in bed, if you're not able to get up. As you move through the exercises, you'll focus on different parts of your breath—exhalation, inhalation, or both.

The exercises shouldn't be terribly taxing, and certainly should not be painful. You may feel a few aches and pains as you wake up long-slumbering muscles, but if you feel any sustained pain, or any pain in your joints, stop immediately. Check with your instructor to make

sure you're not doing something incorrectly. If that doesn't clear up the problem, see your doctor to find out if there's some underlying physical problem that's causing the pain.

## **FINDING A QUALIFIED INSTRUCTOR**

You'll find qi gong classes at holistic health centers, gyms, yoga centers, parks, and YMCAs. You can even take classes in this ancient healing art at certain junior colleges and high schools through their adult education programs.

Picking your instructor will be a matter of personal choice. Find one that you feel comfortable with, and stay away from anyone who promises that qi gong is some kind of miracle cure. For more information, you can contact the National Qi Gong Association at P.O. Box 540, Ely, Minnesota 55731; phone 218-365-6330 or 1-888-218-7788; or visit their website, [nqa.org](http://nqa.org).

# 13

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## Herbs

Any part of a plant that can be used as a medicine—the roots, stems, leaves, bark, seeds, or flowers—qualifies as an herb. In days past, almost every medicine we had was made from herbs, which gently encourage your body to heal itself. Unfortunately, with the discovery of modern medicines in the early twentieth century that could eradicate symptoms with a one-two punch, herbs fell out of favor. Today, however, herbs have made a comeback, as people have discovered that the body often responds just as well or even better to more natural methods of healing.

Herbs can be used in many different ways. They can be eaten whole, ground into powder, pressed to make extract, or mixed with cream or ointment to make balm. But if you want to use herbs, make sure you buy only reputable herbal preparations, either off the shelf or from pharmacies. Herbs are medicine and should be treated as such. You wouldn't buy unwrapped aspirin from a street vendor, so don't be careless about the source of your herbs, either.

A word of caution: some herbs may interfere or interact with medications that you're currently using, causing dangerous reactions. A few, including feverfew, have some potentially serious side effects, and any herb can be harmful if taken in excess. Be sure you tell your

physician about any herbs you're currently taking or planning to take, and do so only under his or her supervision.

## AN HERBAL GLOSSARY

Before looking at the herbs that can quiet down that jackhammer in your head, let's review some of the terms herbalists use. You don't need to memorize anything; just glance through the following definitions so you'll understand them when they pop up in later descriptions:

- **Antispasmodic**—This term describes a category of herbs that help relax unnecessary muscle contractions, such as the herb rue.
- **Bitter**—As the name indicates, herbs in this category taste slightly to terribly bitter. It's believed that wormwood and other bitter herbs can help detoxify the body, regulate the release of certain hormones, stimulate the appetite, and improve digestion. Bitters are also known as digestive bitters.
- **Diaphoretic**—Herbs in this category, such as yarrow and cayenne, help cleanse the body by encouraging sweating.
- **Hypnotic**—This term describes herbs, such as passionflower, that encourage deep, healing sleep.
- **Infusion**—This refers to a "tea" made with herbs, typically using 2 teaspoons of dried or 4 teaspoons of fresh herb, steeped in 1 cup boiling water for 10 minutes. The liquid is then strained and drunk like a tea.
- **Nervine**—This category refers to herbs that have positive effects on the nervous system. Some nervines relax the system, some stimulate it, and some tone it. Nervines can also help eliminate the anxiety and stress that accompany many diseases

and make everything seem worse. Oats and vervain are popular nervines.

- **Sedative**—These herbs, such as valerian and St. John's wort, act on the nervous system to reduce anxiety and stress.
- **Stimulant**—In this category, herbs heighten or speed up various bodily functions. Bayberry, for example, stimulates the circulation.
- **Tincture**—This term refers to the concentrated extract of an herb that is diluted in a water or alcohol base.

## HERBS FOR HEADACHES

Selecting herbs for quelling headaches is as much an art as a science. Because of this, you should see a qualified herbalist before beginning to experiment with herbs, rather than self-medicating. Many factors, including the type of headache you suffer from, your biochemistry, and the degree to which stress and anxiety cause or worsen your problem, must be taken into account. Don't be surprised if your herbalist tries out several different "prescriptions" on you before settling on the right herb or combination of herbs. Everybody's different, and every body works differently.

With that in mind, let's take a look at some of the herbs popularly recommended for headaches:

- **Balm** (*Melissa officinalis*)—An antispasmodic and diaphoretic, balm helps relieve anxiety and stress.
- **Chamomile** (*Matricaria chamomilla*)—One of the most popular herbs, chamomile helps quell pain, reduce inflammation and muscle spasms, cleanse the body, and heal wounds. It also helps relieve stress and reverse insomnia, both of which can be especially helpful to people suffering from headaches.

- **Hops** (*Humulus lupulus*)—Long used in the brewing of ale, hops are known to herbalists for their ability to relax certain muscles, induce sleep, and calm anxiety. Caution: hops have sedative properties, which means they can be counterproductive to those people suffering from depression or related problems.

- **Jamaican dogwood** (*Piscidia erythrina*)—A hypnotic, sedative, and antispasmodic, this herb is so powerful that some fishermen in the West Indies use it to sedate fish so they can catch them more easily. Jamaican dogwood can be especially helpful when you're trying to fall asleep while in the throes of a headache. Caution: pregnant women should not take this herb.

- **Lady's slipper** (*Cypripedium pubescens*)—This herb is a prized nervine that is used to treat many stress-related ailments, especially those accompanied by anxiety. It's considered a good treatment for tension headaches, relieving the stress that can cause or worsen the problem.

- **Lime flower** (*Tilia europaea*)—Lime flower tea is a headache remedy that works by relieving the tension that triggers or worsens the head pain. It's also helpful for treating insomnia.

- **Pasqueflower** (*Anemone pulsatilla*)—Legend has it that this herb was born from the tears of the Greek goddess of love, Venus. It's used to relieve headaches and anxiety. Caution: fresh pasqueflower is quite dangerous, and the herb should be used only in conjunction with expert advice.

- **Rosemary** (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)—Taken internally or applied as an infusion to the pained spot, this herb is a time-tested remedy for headaches.

- **Scullycap** (*Scutellaria laterifolia*)—Perhaps the most popular of all nervines, this herb can help you relax in the face of anxiety, nervousness, and tension headaches. Caution: if you take large doses, you may feel dizzy or confused.

- **Valerian** (*Valeriana officinalis*)—A sedative and antispasmodic, valerian is a helpful in reducing pain due to tension and encouraging sleep.



Other herbs, including hawthorn, marjoram, vervain, and thyme, also may be helpful in easing headache pain.

## HERBS FOR MIGRAINES

A few herbs are especially prized for their ability to help relieve the symptoms of migraine headaches.

- **Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*)**—This herb commanded attention worldwide in the late 1970s, when newspapers published reports of a British woman who used it to cure her migraines. Since then, studies have shown that feverfew possesses a wealth of anti-headache properties, including inhibition of inflammation and relief from depression. Some herbalists recommend using feverfew prophylactically, taking it daily to prevent headaches. Be careful, however, for some people have developed ulcers of the mouth after taking feverfew.

- **Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)**—An aromatic herb with antispasmodic, nervine, and diaphoretic properties, peppermint can be helpful if your migraines are linked to digestive problems (nausea, vomiting, and so forth). You'll find peppermint oil in many balms, liniments, and massage oils. Besides smelling good, it helps relieve pain.

- **Wood betony (*Stachys betonica*)**—A bitter, nervine tonic and sedative, this herb stimulates the circulation and calms the nervous system. It can be taken as an infusion or tincture.

## FINDING A QUALIFIED HERBAL PRACTITIONER

Herbs are medicine and are nothing to trifle with, so find a qualified herbal expert to guide you, at least until you know what works and

what's safe. Your best bet is to work with a naturopathic physician who is qualified in herbal medicine—and be sure to let your M.D. know about all the herbs you plan to take.

To receive list of herbalists, contact the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians located at 602 Valley Street, Suite 105, Seattle, Washington 98109; phone 206-298-0126; or visit their website, [naturopathic.org](http://naturopathic.org).

# 14

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## Hot and Cold Therapies

My sister has always been a real worrywart. In fact, when she was a kid, she worried so much about things that she often got headaches. And when she did, the first thing my mother would do was put her to bed with a cold cloth on her head.

Now that I know something about headaches, the cold cloth makes perfect sense. Since the majority of headaches are due to dilation of the blood vessels in the head, it follows that something cool applied to the head would help those blood vessels contract and come back down to normal size. But hot therapies may help, too, by easing tension and diverting some of the throbbing blood from the brain to other areas of the body. Alternating hot and cold therapies can be helpful, as well.

### **COLD THERAPIES**

Here are some cold therapies to try:

- Apply cold wet packs to the forehead, any other painful area of the head, and the back of the neck. This will help constrict the blood vessels and ease the pounding effects of blood rushing to the head.

- Apply an ice pack to the painful area of the head or to the carotid arteries (located on either side of the neck).
- Apply a cold percussion shower to your feet, using the “massage” setting on your showerhead. This will help divert blood circulation away from the head.
- Take a cool enema. This will help relieve a buildup of toxic wastes in the colon.
- Put a chilled eye pack over the eyes. In drugstores or mail-order catalogs, you can find a soft, plastic eye pack that’s filled with a special gel. Pop it in the refrigerator for half an hour, then apply it to your eyes and take a nice long rest. The pack will stay cool for up to an hour.

## HOT THERAPIES

The following therapies ease pain by applying heat:

- Take a hot hip bath. Sit in hot water up to your waist (no higher) to increase blood circulation in the lower half of the body.
- Submerge your feet in a hot foot bath. Add peppermint essential oil for stimulation or lavender for relaxation, whichever sounds best to you.
- Take a long hot shower. This will increase relaxation and divert circulation from the head to the rest of the body.
- Apply a hot percussion shower to the feet. This is another “diversionary tactic.”
- Apply heat packs to areas of tension. This can help relax problem areas like the neck, shoulders, or upper back.
- Apply warm leg wraps. To divert the circulation from the head to the lower legs, dip a cloth in a mixture of warm water and Fuller’s earth, and use it to wrap the calf of one leg from knee to ankle. Repeat with the other leg. You can leave these cloths in place for sev-

eral hours. Fuller's earth can be found at your local pharmacy. Use 1 tablespoon of Fuller's earth to 1 cup of water.

## **ALTERNATING HOT AND COLD THERAPIES**

Alternating applications of hot and cold can help ease headaches caused by tension or spasms in the blood vessels. This combination therapy can also reroute the blood supply away from the headache site. Remember to end each session with an application of cold, to help blood vessels constrict. Three methods for alternating hot and cold therapies to ease headache pain include:

- Alternate hot and cold compresses to the head.
- Alternate hot and cold leg baths.
- Alternate hot and cold percussion showers to the feet.

Sometimes, when you're in the throes of a killer headache, the only things that seem to help are a nap and an ice pack to the head. Hot and cold therapies may sound simple and old-fashioned, but they do help. You're probably well acquainted with the cold compress to the head but less familiar with some of the diversionary tactics. Try them out—you may be pleasantly surprised.

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# 15

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## Cleanse the Colon

Plenty of famous movie stars, rich business folk, and international jet setters swear by them. Princess Diana liked them so much, in fact, that she spent more than \$4,000 a year on them. What are they all so excited about? Colonics, also known as colon cleansing, bowel irrigation, colenemas, and high enemas.

We all know what a regular enema is—the introduction of water or some other solution into the rectum for cleansing or for relieving constipation. Colonics are an extreme version of the same thing, but they (colonics) infuse a large amount of water—as much as forty gallons—into your colon. Once inside, the water gently washes away layers of built-up wastes and toxins; then it's drawn out and flushed away. Plain water is usually used, but the water may contain other substances, including coffee. In fact, coffee enemas are an integral part of a well-known alternative treatment for cancer.

While there isn't a body of scientific evidence to back up the idea that cleansing the colon can improve your health, the theory does have many champions—including some medical doctors. The concept that toxins held in the bowel can cause disease has been around for a long time. Herodotus, a historian of the fifth century A.D., wrote about the popularity of bowel cleansing among the Greeks. And in the 1800s, a famous Russian biologist named Metchnikoff said that

the colon was the gravest threat of all to our health. In the United States, Dr. John Kellogg of Kellogg's cereal fame brought the art of cleansing the colon to new heights in the early part of the 1900s as part of a health spa regimen.

Unfortunately, the crowds flocking to Kellogg's health sanatorium were just about the last of the masses willing to purge their innards for good health. The use of colonics waned, the good results many had claimed were scoffed at, and the procedure was considered kooky. Yet today it's once again gaining in popularity and has received attention from the *Boston Globe*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and other respectable media. Even some heavy hitters in the medical profession are starting to give colonics a second look.

Naturopaths, chiropractors, colonic therapists, and other colonics enthusiasts heartily endorse the idea that most diseases are related to problems in the colon. Essentially a long tube, the colon (which is about three feet long and looks like an upside-down U) is the last stop for the food we eat. Once the food reaches the colon, it's already been almost entirely processed by the body, but some important changes take place as the food makes its way through this final passage. The body receives food residue and absorbs both water and minerals. Bacteria in the colon digest certain fibers, and the feces are formed and stored. All in all, your dinner will take an estimated one to three days to complete its tour of the colon.

Proponents of colonics argue that something goes wrong in just about everyone's colon. Debris (fecal matter, mucus, and so forth) builds up on the colon wall, then bacteria begin to grow in this muck and slowly release toxins into the system. This idea is not as crazy as it sounds. More than half of those over fifty years old have a condition called diverticulosis, in which little pockets form in the colon wall. Fecal matter can easily get stuck in these pockets and stay there indefinitely.

A host of ailments can stem from this problem (called *retained feces* in the medical world), including headaches, allergies, muscle aches,



insomnia, elevated blood pressure, hypoglycemia, arthritis, memory difficulty, fatigue, bad breath, abdominal bloating, gas, and digestive problems. But while the problem may sound terrible, proponents of colonics say the solution is simple: just rinse it away.

## HOW COLONICS WORK

Your first colonic should be performed by a professional in a sterile environment (the therapist's office). As the patient, you'll lie on a table that has a built-in receptacle (a toilet) at the end, and the table will slant so that your head is slightly elevated. The therapist will insert a speculum attached to a hose into your rectum. The hose, in turn, is attached to an irrigation machine that will do all the work for you. The therapist (called a *hydrotherapist* or *colonic hydrotherapist*) will turn on the machine, then adjust the dials to make sure you'll receive just the right amount of water and that the water temperature will be just slightly higher than your own. After enough water has been pumped in to fill your colon, the therapist will massage your abdomen to move the water through. Then the water (and everything else) will be pulled out through the hose. The entire procedure will involve several fills and releases and will use a total of twenty to forty gallons of water.

It's possible to learn to do this yourself at home by attaching a special board to your toilet and operating the equipment yourself. But it's certainly safer and more hygienic to have your colonics performed by a professional because colonic equipment that's not sterilized properly can cause infections.

There's no consensus as to how many times you should have your colon cleansed. Experts say that it takes more than just one colonic to cleanse and detoxify your system, and they often suggest a series of five to get the body back in shape. Some people get a treatment every couple of weeks to keep internal wastes from building up in the first place. Ask your therapist what he or she thinks would be best for you.

## THE BENEFITS OF COLONICS

According to colonics enthusiasts, you should feel better once all the gunk is washed out of your colon. Your body should be able to process food more efficiently. You should feel healthier and more energetic because you're no longer subjected to low-level, around-the-clock poisoning from within. Your bowel habits should improve, your immune system should become stronger, and your headache pain should ease (assuming, of course, your headaches are caused by long-term internal poisoning).

Most physicians feel that colonics are not helpful but probably not harmful either—not harmful, that is, if they're done very infrequently and only under the most careful and sterile of conditions. Doctors do warn against overuse of colonics, however, because these treatments may make the muscles of the bowel lazy and ineffective and interfere with their normal reflexes. Also, excessive fluid absorption through the colon may trigger heart failure in some people.

Certain people should absolutely *not* have colonics. Those with high blood pressure, diverticulitis, any other bowel disease, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, tumors of the intestines or rectum, or severe hemorrhoids and those who are pregnant should avoid this procedure. Before you undergo any internal cleansing procedure, check with your physician to make sure your body is up to it.

## FINDING A QUALIFIED COLON HYDROTHERAPIST

To find a referral list of certified colon hydrotherapists, contact the International Association for Colon Hydrotherapy at P.O. Box 461285, San Antonio, Texas 78246; phone 210-366-2888; or visit their website, [i-act.org](http://i-act.org).

# 16

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## Massage Therapy

Ahh! There's nothing like a relaxing massage to soothe you on several different levels at once. The feeling of warm, strong hands kneading your muscles, soothing music playing softly in the background, perhaps the calming aroma of lavender wafting up toward your nose. What a way to just let it all go!

But relaxing rubdowns are only the tip of the iceberg in the massage world. There are all kinds of massage, ranging from the kind that can put you to sleep to the kind that can make a trip to the dentist sound like a great alternative. The most popular kind is *Swedish massage*, also known as *effleurage*, which involves the gentle kneading and stroking of the skin and muscles. The therapist exerts extra pressure on tight, knotted muscles to break up tension and increase relaxation. A variation of Swedish massage includes the use of hot rocks (actually smooth, warmed stones), which are placed on the back in strategic areas to warm the muscles and make them more amenable to massage. Later in the massage, slightly cool rocks may be used for stimulation.

For those who want a massage that works on specific problem areas, there's *shiatsu*, a Japanese form of therapeutic massage based on the same principles as acupuncture, but without needles. During a shiatsu session, the therapist applies pressure to various points on the

body with the goal of releasing energy blockages. If your problem is severe and your therapist applies strong pressure, shiatsu can be a bit painful. Be aware that the therapist will not necessarily press on your problem areas, but on certain acupressure points. As a result, energy that is blocked in those areas can be released, which should help areas “downstream” from the acupressure point to heal and regain balance.

Another massage method that uses targeted pressure is *trigger point therapy*, a highly focused technique in which the therapist applies strong pressure on specific “trigger points” on the body. A trigger point is a painful spot in an overworked muscle that refers (sends) pain to other muscles. (That’s why an overworked muscle in your neck may be causing pain in your head.) Unlike shiatsu, trigger point therapy usually exerts pressure right on the painful areas. For trigger point therapy to work, the therapist must really dig in and press hard and sustain that pressure for several seconds. This action flushes out toxins, calms the nerves, and releases the tension in that area. As you can imagine, trigger point therapy hurts while it’s going on but feels great when it stops. When my neck and shoulder muscles tighten up, sometimes the only thing that can release the tension is trigger point therapy. Often the results last for weeks.

For the really venturesome, there are more-strenuous forms of massage, including myofascial release, deep tissue massage, and Rolfing, all of which may involve some intense, painful probing into the muscles. Fingers, knuckles, and elbows may be used to release tension or loosen up the thin membrane called the *fascia* that covers the muscles and can become tight in response to stress, injury, or overuse.

Most massage therapists know several techniques, so you can work with your therapist to plan your own massage session. I prefer Swedish massage with occasional touches of shiatsu, but you may want something more vigorous or more focused to release chronic tension. Do whatever makes you feel the best. Just remember, you

have alternatives, so ask your massage therapist about all of the possibilities.

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR MASSAGE

Whether you get a massage at an exclusive spa, at a gym, at your chiropractor's office, or in your own home, take charge of the experience. Get the relaxation process started in advance by taking a warm bath or shower to loosen up your muscles. Try to schedule the session so you don't have to rush directly from work to the massage (all stressed out) or jump back into things immediately afterward. Leave some time to wind down beforehand and enjoy the great feeling of relaxation when the massage is finished.

Begin your session by telling the therapist exactly what's bothering you, which kinds of massage techniques you like, and which you don't like. If you don't know, ask questions; find out what he or she intends to do and why, and clearly state what sounds good to you.

Once the massage begins, focus on relaxing completely. Let your mind drift into a dreamlike state. Some therapists are like your friendly neighborhood bartender, willing to chat with you and listen to anything you want to say. If you find that enjoyable, chat away. But don't feel you have to. If you'd rather remain silent (or even fall asleep), do it. If possible, give your therapist some feedback during the massage. Let him or her know what hurts, what feels good, where you'd like more or less massage, and so on.

Once your massage is finished, take it easy. Lie on the table for a few minutes before jumping up and getting dressed. If you can, lounge around for a while before returning to the "real world." If you happen to be getting your massage at a spa, stay for a while to enjoy the amenities (e.g., Jacuzzi, pool, sunroom, and so on).

Also, be sure to drink plenty of water after your massage to help your body flush out toxins. Massage stimulates the circulation of lymph, the body's waste material and drinking lots of water will help wash these wastes away more quickly.

## SELF-MASSAGE FOR HEADACHE MANAGEMENT

If you don't have the time or the money to get a professional massage or you simply prefer to do it yourself, here are few simple techniques for self-massage that can help you manage your headaches:

- Gently turn your head to one side, then the other, to stretch your neck muscles a little bit. Then gently shake your head, if it doesn't make the pain worse, and use your fingers and thumbs to massage the back of your head and neck.
- If tense neck muscles are contributing to your problem, sit in a comfortable chair and gently let your head drop until your chin almost touches your neck. Then gently massage the muscles on the back of your neck. Pay extra attention to any knots you feel.
- Massage both sides of your upper head, from your temples to the area directly over your ears. Using fingers or thumbs, massage with a circular motion.
- Place the palms of your hands on the sides of your head, with the bottoms of the palms at temple level. Press in slightly, then move your hands slowly in a circular motion: up to your crown, toward the back of your head, then back down to starting position. Repeat 5 times.

Another self-massage technique involves the traditional Chinese medicine concept of *meridians* (the invisible channels in the body that transport the qi). Headaches in the temples, forehead, and back of the head are believed to stem from blockages in the gall bladder meridian, which runs from the fourth toe up the body to the top of the head. Clearing energy blockages in this meridian may help reduce

headache pain or eliminate it altogether. To do so, you'll need to massage the meridian at a specific point on the outer thighs.

You can find that point by standing straight with your arms hanging loosely at your sides. Without reaching or stretching in any way, touch each middle finger to its corresponding position on the outer thigh. The spot that you naturally touch is close to the spot you need to massage, but you may have to probe around a little to find just the right place. It should be a little tender if you're in the midst of a headache. Firmly massage the spot using a circular motion for 10 seconds, then stop for 10 seconds. Repeat several times, using this on-and-off pattern.

If you have a migraine headache, rather than massaging the spot, gently brush it with your fingertips, using the 10-second on-and-off pattern.

## WHAT MASSAGE CAN DO FOR YOU

The benefits of a relaxing massage are many, including these:

- Slower heart rate
- Decreased pain levels
- Increased blood circulation
- Decreased muscle tension
- Decreased blood pressure
- Lowered stress levels
- End of ongoing stress reactions
- Increased level of endorphins, the “feel good” hormones
- Improved circulation of the lymph, the milky white fluid that carries away impurities and waste

There's no proven correlation between massage and headache prevention or relief. But, since stress is a major cause of headaches, it makes sense that a stress reliever like massage should be helpful in a headache management plan. It certainly seems to ease my tension

headaches. If I've got a headache at the beginning of a massage, by the end it's either gone or markedly reduced. Even if I don't have a headache, after an hour of massage, my rock-like neck, shoulder, and upper back muscles are loose and tension free. That's got to do something to keep my headaches at bay, at least for a while.

## **FINDING A QUALIFIED MASSAGE THERAPIST**

To find a massage therapist, try asking your friends, physical therapist, or chiropractor. For a certified massage therapist, you can get referrals from the American Massage Therapy Association at 820 Davis Street, Suite 100, Evanston, Illinois 60201; phone 847-864-0123; or visit their website, [amtamassage.org](http://amtamassage.org). Or contact the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork at 8301 Greensboro Drive, Suite 300, McLean, Virginia 22102; phone 1-800-296-0664; or visit their website, [ncbtmb.com](http://ncbtmb.com).



# 17

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## **Acupressure and Acupuncture**

For thousands of years, acupressure and acupuncture, two relatively simple methods for easing pain and treating a variety of ailments, have been mainstays of traditional Chinese medicine. A basic tenet of both methods is that the body is filled with qi. Good health depends on the constant and free flow of qi throughout the body, moving through invisible channels called meridians. But sometimes the flow of qi becomes slowed or even blocked within the meridians, and this sluggishness or stagnation is believed to be the root of all disease.

A blockage of qi is something like the narrowing of a coronary artery in heart disease: Unless a certain amount of fresh blood makes it through the artery to feed and oxygenate the heart muscle, the heart will suffer. If the problem is severe enough, a heart attack may result. Similarly, when the flow of qi is slowed or cut off, the parts of the body serviced by that meridian will suffer. In certain cases, the result can be a headache.

Fortunately, it's a lot easier to clear blocked meridians than it is to deal with clogged arteries. You don't have to suffer through cardiac catheterization or coronary artery bypass surgery. Instead, you sim-

ply stimulate the meridians in special areas called acupoints, where the meridians run close to the body surface. With acupressure, the acupoints are stimulated by applying pressure. With acupuncture, they're stimulated by the insertion of very thin needles. Either method is believed to help restore the flow of qi, thus allowing the body to heal itself.

## ACUPRESSURE FOR HEADACHES

The most obvious place to begin your exploration of acupressure is in the office of a certified practitioner of acupressure or acupuncture. But, other skilled health professionals also practice acupressure, including most massage therapists and some physical therapists. Eventually you can learn to perform acupressure on yourself, but it's best to begin with a professional.

During a session, you'll lie on a padded table or a mat on the floor, and the acupressurist will use fingers, thumbs, elbows, and palms to apply pressure to various acupoints. But acupressure involves more than just pressure. Rolling, kneading, vibrating, and rotating motions are also used, and the process may involve the use of wooden rollers, balls, pointers, or other tools. All of these methods are designed to break up energy blockages and restore the flow of qi. So if qi blockages are the cause of your headaches, acupressure should help reduce your pain.

There's nothing like a session with a skilled professional, but once you've had some sessions with an expert, you can learn to self-treat. The basic principles are simple:

- Apply pressure smoothly and gradually. Don't bear down as if you're trying to drive a nail into the acupoint, and don't jab. Exert a firm, steady pressure.
- Press with enough force to produce a "good hurt," a twinge that tells you something is happening, but not real pain.

- Maintain the pressure while making a circular motion on the point for 1 to 3 minutes, then release.
- Breathe deeply and rhythmically during the sessions.

Headaches can arise from blockages in many different areas, including the liver, stomach, gallbladder, or bladder meridians. You'll need to see a professional to find out where your blockages occur and which acupoints to press. But there are several general acupoints that are used to relieve headaches:

- **The soft, fleshy area between the base of the thumb and the bottom of the index finger**—Some people report that this area becomes tender when they're in the throes of a headache, so don't be surprised if you feel pain there when you start pressing.

- **The area between the eyes where the top of nose meets the forehead**—Pressing on both sides of the bridge of the nose may help with a headache that strikes in the front of the head or the sinuses.

- **The notch of the collarbone (the U-shaped indentation at the base of the front of your neck)**—Press on the “inside” (bottom) of the bone.

- **Midway between the outside of the eye and the ear**—Pressing on the bone in that area can help ease headaches that strike on the side of the head.

- **Right above the ear**—Pressing above one ear can ease headaches that strike on that side of the head only.

- **In the tender point in your shoulder (trapezoid) muscles**—You'll know it when you find the area (yeeouch!). This is helpful for headaches that strike in the back of the head.

- **The point between the big toe and the second toe, about an inch back from the base of the toes**—This is a good spot to press for migraines.

You can perform acupressure on yourself when your headaches begin, or do it every day to help prevent them. If you feel significant pain during acupressure, stop and find out why. It shouldn't hurt that

much. By the way, you may feel pain somewhere else while you're pressing on one spot. This *referred pain* suggests that you have a related problem in the second area, which may also need treatment.

## ACUPUNCTURE FOR HEADACHES

According to acupuncturists, as many as five hundred points on the body are connected to nerve receptors. When extremely thin stainless-steel needles (some no thicker than a hair) are eased into some of these areas (acupoints), the nerve cells are stimulated and pain decreases. Although Western science can't explain why it might work, acupuncture is thought to trigger the release of endorphins, the body's "feel good" hormones that fight pain and depression. Studies have found that acupuncture also stimulates the immune and circulatory systems.

When you first visit an acupuncturist, you may be surprised at the amount of time he or she spends interviewing you. Naturally, you'll be asked about your symptoms, your medical history, and your pain, but you'll also be quizzed about your diet, sleeping habits, bowel habits, and emotional state. The acupuncturist will probably examine your tongue, fingernails, eyes, and skin; may listen to your speaking voice, bowel sounds, and breathing; and will take your pulse. The idea is to find out the source of the imbalance in your body that's leading to your headaches.

During an acupuncture session, you'll loosen your clothes, lie down on a padded table, and receive one or more of the following treatments:

- **Insertion of acupuncture needles**—Very thin acupuncture needles are slid into the designated acupoints and left in place for twenty to forty minutes. The needles may seem to be in places that are mighty far from your head, but energy pathways extend through-

out the body, and blockages in your leg may be causing your head pain. Be patient.

- **Insertion of acupuncture needles and application of a low-level electrical current**—The acupuncturist inserts the needles, then attaches them via tiny wires to a machine that delivers a low-grade dose of electricity. When the machine is turned on, the needles exude a slight vibration for a somewhat more intense stimulation of the nerves. It shouldn't hurt or even feel annoying, and the machine can be adjusted to increase or decrease the intensity of the current.

- **Burning of herbs (moxibustion)**—An herb called mugwort (or *moxa* in Chinese) is burned over the acupuncture points to stimulate them. The herb, in pill form, is attached to a piece of cardboard that is placed on the acupoint. As the pill burns gently and slowly on top of the cardboard, the acupoint is stimulated by the heat.

- **Cupping**—Little glass cups are warmed and placed on top of the acupuncture points, and as they cool, they create a suction-cup effect that stimulates the area.

If you decide to try acupuncture, be aware that you may need five or six sessions before the treatment “takes” and you see results. But once you experience pain relief, it may last for days, weeks, or even months. For best results, get regular acupuncture treatments once or twice a week for at least two months. Then, if you feel it's working, you may want to cut back to once a week or once every other week.

## FINDING A QUALIFIED PRACTITIONER

Acupressure and acupuncture are generally considered safe when performed by qualified health experts. However, you should be very careful with either method if you're pregnant. Be sure to let your therapist know if you are pregnant, have any diseases or chronic conditions, or are taking any medications.

You can find a good practitioner of either acupuncture or acupressure at the same source: The National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) at 11 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 330, Alexandria, Virginia 22314; phone 703-548-9004; or visit their website, [nccaom.org](http://nccaom.org). The NCCAOM is the big certifying organization for acupuncturists, and with a member list of some nine thousand certified practitioners, it's bound to include someone located in your area.

Because acupressure (also known as shiatsu) is practiced by a great many massage therapists, you may be also be able to find an acupressurist by contacting the American Massage Therapy Association at 820 Davis Street, Suite 100, Evanston, Illinois 60201; phoning 847-864-0123; sending an E-mail [info@inet.amtamassage.org](mailto:info@inet.amtamassage.org); or visiting their website, [amtamassage.org](http://amtamassage.org). Your doctor, chiropractor, or physical therapist may also be a good referral source for acupressure or acupuncture practitioners.

# 18

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## Chiropractic

In your daily life, you probably try to avoid being manipulated. (Think whiny children!) But if you suffer from headaches, manipulation can be a good thing—if it's provided by a chiropractor.

Growing in popularity and covered by many health insurance plans, chiropractic aims to relieve headaches by straightening out misaligned musculoskeletal systems. Chiropractic was built on the notion that many health problems (including headaches) are caused by misalignments of the spinal vertebrae called *subluxations*. These subluxations interfere with the workings of nearby nerves, creating problems that can range throughout the body. Thus, chiropractic diagnosis is based on finding problems with the alignment of the spine and treating them by manipulating or adjusting the spine.

Our word *chiropractic* comes from the Greek for “done by hand,” and that’s the chiropractor’s most valuable tool: his or her hands. Your chiropractor will look for strained muscles, poorly functioning joints, and blood vessels that have become enlarged or constricted, for these can also contribute to headaches. Then the chiropractor uses his or her hands to gently realign the spine. Some chiropractors also use a handheld device called an *activator*, which looks something like a tiny pogo stick. Placing the activator on certain misaligned areas and pulling the trigger can usually deliver enough force to correct sub-

luxations. Several studies have shown that these simple chiropractic techniques can help ease headaches in many people.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE CHIROPRACTOR'S OFFICE**

Your treatment will probably begin with a long conversation about your headaches: when they strike, how much they hurt, how long they last, what seems to cause or relieve them, what other treatments you've had. You'll also be asked about your general health, your work and personal habits, and perhaps your diet and supplement regimen. Then comes the physical examination, with an emphasis on the way you carry yourself and use your body. You may be asked to bend forward and backward or from side to side. The chiropractor will feel along your spine to see what happens when you move and to look for any problems with the spinal alignment and joints. He or she may also prod and examine the muscles and tissues adjacent to the spine and elsewhere to get a sense of your general muscle firmness and balance. X-rays of your spine may be taken to show misalignments and provide a baseline against which to gauge the results of treatment.

Then comes the treatment, which is based on spinal manipulation (also called an adjustment). Since the area targeted for treatment will likely be the back, shoulders, and/or neck, you lie face down on a padded table that usually has a hole cut out for your face so you don't have to turn your head. The chiropractor begins by massaging the muscles around the areas to be adjusted in order to loosen you up; then he or she makes the adjustments. Other areas of your body (back of the knees, hips, even jaw) may also be adjusted, if necessary.

Adjustment can take several forms, including the pushing or pressing of the joints or muscles, massage, acupuncture, and other forms of bodywork. Your chiropractor may use an activator. Your back may be "cracked" as the chiropractor attempts to push the targeted joint just a little farther than it wants to go, then releases. (Cracking of the



joints is usually optional.) The various adjustments may be uncomfortable and slightly painful, but they should not hurt a lot. If they do, something is wrong.

Finally, your chiropractor may teach you some exercises to perform to help strengthen the weak areas of your body and reduce pressure on your spine. He or she may also show you how to walk, sit, and stand so as to reduce the strain on your spine.

## **DOES CHIROPRACTIC WORK?**

Chiropractic can and does help many people who suffer from headaches. Besides correcting spinal problems that may be causing your headaches, chiropractic can help relax tense muscles in your back, shoulders, and neck that may be exacerbating your problem. Several studies suggest that this therapy can reduce both the number and severity of migraines and other headaches. In one study, 98 percent of 150 migraine patients enjoyed rapid relief thanks to adjustments of the neck plus traction. In another, 100 people suffering from headaches related to neck problems received chiropractic treatment; 75 percent reported a major improvement after several treatments.

Remember, chiropractic manipulation is not like taking a drug. You may need two to three sessions a week for a few weeks before the offending misalignments are corrected. So, don't expect your headaches to disappear magically after the first visit. Be patient and persistent. It's cumulative and it takes time.

Although chiropractic manipulation is generally considered safe, there's a small chance that it can compress or damage joints, discs, nerves, or arteries. If you have bone or joint problems, infections, tumors, or cancer of the bone, you'll probably be better off passing on chiropractic treatment. The elderly, those with heart problems or elevated blood pressure, and those taking blood-thinning drugs also should avoid chiropractic.

## FINDING A QUALIFIED CHIROPRACTOR

As is the case with all professionals, there are good and bad chiropractors. Since they all must be licensed by their respective states, any legitimate chiropractor will meet certain minimum qualifications. Beyond that, look for one who spends at least twenty minutes with you at each session and always performs some kind of massage or soft-tissue manipulation before doing the adjustment. The better chiropractors will learn as much as possible about you and your headaches before rushing into treatment, and they won't try to sell you special supplements, pillows, or other extras.

To find a good one, start by asking your doctor, physical therapist, or friends for recommendations. Since many insurance plans cover chiropractic as long as you use a chiropractor from their approved list, you may want to make your selection accordingly. Another way to locate a chiropractor in your area is by contacting the American Chiropractic Association at 1701 Clarendon Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22209; phoning 1-800-986-4636; or visiting their website, [amerchiro.org](http://amerchiro.org).

# 19

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## Korean Hand Therapy

One day when my head was really throbbing, I made an urgent appointment to get my hands poked, prodded, and bandaged. The treatment I was seeking is called Korean hand therapy or Koryo hand therapy (KHT). A combination of new and old approaches to healing, KHT was created in the 1970s by a doctor of Chinese medicine and is based on various ancient theories of traditional Chinese medicine.

According to the principles of traditional Chinese medicine and other Eastern healing systems, good health depends upon the constant, unbridled flow of qi through the body. This energy flows along invisible channels, or meridians, that run throughout the body. KHT builds upon this basic principle and adds a few more:

- A smooth, balanced flow of blood to the brain is necessary for health. An imbalance in the flow of blood “up top” can cause not only headaches, but also all kinds of ailments affecting just about every part of the body.
- The flow of blood to the brain can be monitored by checking the yin and yang pulses, which are found in the neck and the wrist. If the strength of these pulses feels different from each other, there’s a problem with blood flow.

- By manipulating specific points on the hands, a KHT practitioner can correct an imbalance in blood flow anywhere in the body.

## A MAP IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

A basic tenet of KHT is that the parts of the body can be “mapped out” on the hand. That is, a specific point on the hand corresponds to each and every area of the body.

Hold your right hand out in front of you, palm up. The head and face are governed by the top of your middle finger, from the very tip of the finger down to about the first joint. All the points corresponding to the front of your head and your face (forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, and so forth) are in this top joint of the middle finger. Conversely, the points for the back of your head are on the back side (nail side) of the top joint of your middle finger. As you move down the middle finger to the middle joint, you’ll find the points for the larynx and lungs. The bottom joint rules the heart and, right where the middle finger connects to the palm, the stomach. As you continue down to the palm of the hand, you’ll find the points for the intestines, adrenal glands, bladder, sexual organs, and so on.

But the action isn’t all found in the middle finger or the middle of your hand. The hand points for the upper limbs, for example, are on the index and ring fingers, while the points for the lower limbs are on the thumb and pinky. And don’t forget the back of the hand, where you’ll find the points for the posterior side of the body.

Then the hands have a second map, which corresponds to the body’s meridians (energy channels). It’s too complex to explain the layout of the full map, but suffice it to say that if your head were throbbing, the KHT therapist might work on hand points governing the afflicted meridian, as well as those corresponding to areas of the head. The following meridians are most commonly linked to headaches:

- The urinary bladder meridian, which moves up from the body along the neck and over the top of the head, ending by the eye
- The gall bladder–liver meridian, which travels along the side of the head and is commonly associated with migraines
- The stomach meridian, which runs up the front of the face and is associated with frontal headaches

## THE KHT EXPERIENCE

Back to my story. With my head ready to burst from a tension headache, I eased into my car and beat it over to my acupuncturist's office. (Many acupuncturists also perform KHT.)

As with all good therapies, my KHT began with a diagnosis. After all, the doctor wanted to make sure that my headache wasn't a sign of something else. We briefly discussed my problem, then the doctor measured my yin and yang pulses. As it happened, my pulses were "off," an indication that the flow of blood to my brain was out of balance. Next came the main event: the prodding or careful pushing of various points on my hands using a blunt-tipped instrument that looked something like a fat metal pen. This was part of the diagnostic technique: pushing on various hand points until you find the tender ones can tell you where imbalances lie in the body. It doesn't hurt that much, but you'll definitely grimace when the therapist bears down on certain points. If, for example, you wince when the therapist zeros in on the kidney point in the center of your palm, there's probably something going on with your kidneys.

Sure enough, when my therapist pressed on the appropriate hand points for headaches, I let out a startled little gasp: exactly what might be expected in the case of a tension headache. Once the diagnosis was completed, we moved on to the treatment phase (which, truth be

told, seems an awful lot like the diagnosis phase). More pushing and prodding—except this time, it’s all done on tender points (ouch!).

For headaches, the hand points to manipulate are found near the top of the fingertip-side of the middle finger, since that’s the area associated with the head. Perhaps the best way to visualize exactly where to push is to draw a little picture of your face and head on the fingertip side of the top section of your middle finger. If the headache is on the right side of your head, use your right middle finger; if it’s on the left, use the left middle finger. If your headache is in the back of your head, use the back of your middle finger (the nail side). If the pain is on the side, use the side of the middle finger, and if it’s on the top of your head, use the tip-top of your finger. In other words, pretend the top section of your finger is your head. Once you’ve drawn a picture of your face and head on the appropriate middle finger, put a little dot on the picture that corresponds to the part of your head that hurts—that’s the pain point. If you are in doubt or have trouble with the pictures, you can probe around the top part of your middle fingers until you find an area that hurts, then use that as the beginning point for your treatment.

KHT practitioners work on these headache points in several ways:

- They may push on them with the probe or a similar device. Even a ballpoint pen (tip retracted) will do.
- They may zap the pain points with a focused electrical current. (Don’t worry; it doesn’t hurt. You’ll feel a buzzing, but no pain, if the current is set at the proper level.)
- They may stimulate headache points with magnets. This treatment combines KHT with magnet therapy, discussed in Chapter 21.
- They may burn herbs over the pain points. Burning herbs is really not as scary as it sounds. Also known as moxibustion, this is a time-honored treatment in traditional Chinese medicine. The herb comes in the form of a pill, which is attached to a piece of cardboard. The cardboard, with pill on top, is placed on the appropriate hand point. The pill is lit, and as it burns gently and slowly, the heat stimulates the hand point.

These are immediate treatments that cause immediate results, but they can be followed with some long-term therapies like metal stimulation and ring therapy that may have longer-lasting effects. Metal stimulation is very simple: a little piece of metal, perhaps aluminum, gold, or silver, is embedded in the center of a little round bandage. The therapist affixes the bandage right over the appropriate hand point, with the piece of metal resting on and pushing on the point. This is meant to deliver constant stimulation to the appropriate hand points, long after you've left the therapist's office. Rings made of silver or gold may also be worn on certain fingers to tone and regulate internal processes.

Not long after my treatment was finished (in fact, just as I pulled into my driveway with little round bandages all over my fingers), my head did indeed feel better. I suppose I shouldn't have been too surprised, since the originator of KHT came up with this therapy to ease his own headaches, which had often kept him awake at night.

## **FINDING A QUALIFIED KHT PRACTITIONER**

To learn more about KHT, find a KHT practitioner, or purchase supplies, contact Dr. Dan Lobash, Ph.D., L.A., at KHT Systems at P.O. Box 5309, Hemet, California 92544; phone 877-244-4325; or check out his website, [khtsystems.com](http://khtsystems.com). You can also contact the American Institute of Koryo Hand Therapy at 670 Crenshaw Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90005, or phone 323-534-0066.

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# 20

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## Homeopathy

The word *homeopathy* means “similar suffering,” and the practice of homeopathy is based on the idea that the best treatment for any given disease is tiny amounts of the very same thing that causes that disease. This healing art is probably best known as the darling of the British royal family. But homeopathy isn’t just the territory of quirky aristocrats or the occasional health nut. Thousands of people the world over use homeopathic remedies every day, often with very successful results.

The idea of “like cures like” is central to homeopathy, and it resembles the basic concept behind vaccination. To keep from getting, say, the measles, your physician will inject you with a tiny little “sample” of the measles germ—not enough to make you sick, just enough to make your immune system take notice. Your immune system will “study” the measles germ, prepare defenses against it, and then wait for the day that the real measles virus strikes. When that happens, your immune system will be all prepared with antibodies that will destroy the virus—and you will never even know that the virus entered your body.

Homeopathy takes a similar approach. According to homeopathic law, even if you’re already in the throes of an ailment, a little bit of

whatever causes that distress in healthy people can help cure you by shifting your own natural defenses into high gear. Thus, even if you're smack in the middle of a pounding headache, taking a tiny bit of a substance that normally *causes* headaches may solve your problem.

The key word is *tiny*. Each homeopathic medicine or remedy contains an incredibly small dose of a particular active ingredient. To make a homeopathic remedy, one drop of the active substance is mixed with nine drops of a water/alcohol solution (or some other diluting substance). These ten (diluted) drops are thoroughly mixed, and one drop of the resulting solution is removed. This one drop is then mixed with nine drops of a diluting solution, and the process is repeated. Each time, one drop is drawn off the newly diluted solution and diluted even further. When the process is complete, only a barely measurable amount of the "real thing" remains in the homeopathic remedy. That's fine, according to homeopathic theory, which holds that less is actually more. The more diluted the remedy, the stronger its effect.

## HOMEOPATHIC DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Health matters are rarely as easy to understand as we'd like, and homeopathy is no exception. Using a homeopathic remedy to relieve a headache is not a matter of popping a few pills, waiting half an hour, and experiencing blessed relief. To begin with, you'll need to see a homeopathic physician, who will determine your physical, mental, and emotional essence. That's because a headache or any health problem is believed to be a symptom of inner physical, mental, or emotional distress. Homeopathy doesn't actually treat the outer symptoms, like the pounding in your head. Instead, it aims to calm the physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual upset that allowed the problem to arise in the first place.

Before prescribing a remedy, the homeopathic physician will want to know much more than your temperature and pulse rate. He or she will ask you a great many questions about what you like and dislike, when and how well you sleep, what your family life is like, what stresses you face and how you handle them, whether you prefer hot weather to cold, and more. You'll be asked to describe your symptoms in detail. What are you usually doing when the symptoms strike? At what time of day are they usually worse? Do certain foods seem to heighten the problem? (Your headache log, discussed in Chapter 1, will help you answer these questions more accurately and completely.)

Bit by bit, the homeopathic physician will build a "subjective database" filled with information about the inner you—the essential you. Only then can he or she select the remedy most closely attuned to your essence. Out of some two thousand homeopathic remedies, many might be useful for headaches. But only a select few will help you with *your* headaches.

With traditional Western pain relievers, you're supposed to feel better ASAP (unless you're plagued with side effects). But with homeopathic remedies, it's entirely possible that you may feel worse at first. That's because the remedy is designed to attack the inner, essential problem that's afflicting you on the physical, mental, or emotional level. It's supposed to spur on your immune system by making it "think" the body is just a little bit sick. So if you try homeopathy, give your body some time to adjust before you decide whether or not this healing art is for you.

## THE HOMEOPATHIC APPROACH TO HEADACHES

The following list identifies some of the remedies commonly prescribed for headaches, and the kinds of headaches they may be used to treat. The common name is first, followed by its Latin name in parentheses:

- **Anacardium** (*Anacardium*)—For a tearing headache related to strong mental effort. The pain strikes the forehead and the back of the head, and the patient is irritable or angry.
- **Belladonna** (*Belladonna*)—For a throbbing headache that is made worse by movement, noise, or light. It hurts more on the right side than the left, and the face is red.
- **Bryonia** (*Bryonia alba*)—For a headache that generally hurts more in the morning and immediately sends waves of pain through the head with the slightest movement.
- **Gelsemium** (*Gelsemium*)—For headache patients who are listless and tired, and who suffer from a dull pain. The pain is worse in the early hours of the day but eases some after urinating.
- **Ipecac** (*Ipecacuanha*)—For headaches triggered by arthritis of the neck, accompanied by upset stomach and vomiting.
- **Silica** (*Silicea*)—For a headache related to mental exhaustion. The pain moves from the back of the head to the right eye and is worsened by noise or movement.

There are also remedies specifically geared to migraines, including the following remedies:

- **Cimicifuga** (*Cimicifuga racemosa*)—For a migraine that comes from long-term study or worry, with pain that seems to be pressing out against the inside of the skull.
- **Scullcap** (*Scutellaria laterifolia*)—For a migraine that makes you feel restless, producing a dull pain in the front of the head and a reddening of the face.

## FINDING A QUALIFIED HOMEOPATHIC PHYSICIAN

Classical homeopathy has certain requirements: the remedy must be carefully chosen with the patient's essence in mind, only one remedy

may be given at a time, and the smallest possible dose should be used. A newer, more modern form of homeopathy argues that you don't have to be quite so concerned with the patient's essence and that it is okay to take more than one remedy at a time. In fact, some of these "modern" homeopaths encourage you to go to your local drug or vitamin store and buy a remedy or two right off the shelf. Who's right? We really don't know, and we won't know until large-scale studies are conducted. But since homeopathy is such a complex process, used to balance the body and the emotions at a deep cellular level, it makes sense to see a qualified professional, at least in the beginning, until you have some idea of which remedies suit your particular makeup, and how and when to take them.

For a list of trained homeopathic physicians, contact the National Center for Homeopathy at 801 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 306, Alexandria, Virginia 22314; phone 703-548-7790; or visit their website, [homeopathic.org](http://homeopathic.org).

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# 21

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## Magnets

Magnetism as medicine is an ancient idea. Written records dating back to 2000 B.C. refer to healing with magnets, and this “attractive” cure was undoubtedly in use even before then. In the United States, magnetic healing got its start not long after the country was born. In 1795, a Connecticut doctor patented a device designed to balance the body’s magnetic fields and restore health. Today, a wealth of magnetic devices are available, not only in the United States but the world over, as well as magnetic therapists and healers to wield them. Magnetic therapy is backed by an abundance of case histories—plus some intriguing preliminary scientific evidence.

A magnet is simply something that attracts iron. It can take many forms—a nature-made magnetic rock, one of those little horseshoe-shaped toys we played with as kids, or a wire coil to which a direct electrical current is applied (electromagnetism). A magnet can be made of iron oxides mixed with other metals, giving it a rock-solid hardness, or it can take the form of magnetic elements that are mixed with plastic or rubber, making it soft enough to wrap around various parts of your body. Magnets can be permanent, like the one holding your child’s kindergarten artwork to the refrigerator, or they can be temporary. (When the current stops running through a coiled wire, the coil will lose all of its attractive abilities.)

We generally state a magnet's strength in a unit of measurement called *gauss*. The magnetic field of the earth is 0.05 gauss, and a refrigerator magnet has about 60 gauss. A very strong attraction may be measured in *tesla*; 1 tesla is equal to 10,000 gauss. Healing magnets will have their strength listed on the package in either gauss or tesla. Look for the strongest ones you can find, for maximum healing results.

The link between magnetism and disease is based on the idea that we *need* magnetism to survive—or at least to thrive. According to this theory, we're born to live in a "soup," the earth's natural magnetic field. However, over time, the strength of the earth's natural magnetism has slowly declined. So today we live in a more diluted "soup," which causes us to suffer from a variety of problems, including headaches, fatigue, insomnia, mental and emotional difficulties, and nerve and endocrine disorders.

As to how magnets work, well, no one knows for sure. There are plenty of theories. Some people believe magnets increase the flow of blood in the tiny blood vessels. Other theories say magnets increase endorphin levels, block painful nerve signals, enhance electron movement, and influence calcium ions. So far, no single concept has emerged to explain why magnets might relieve pain.

## MAGNETS FOR HEADACHE PAIN

So what can magnets do about your headaches? We don't have stacks of evidence on the effectiveness of magnets. However, some interesting scientific studies have been done on pulsed electromagnetic field therapy (PEMF), which involves intermittently passing an electric current through a magnet and into the body:

- When eleven patients with chronic migraines were treated with PEMFs for two weeks, the frequency of headaches dropped from four per week to less than one.



- Nine headache patients were given either pulsed electromagnetic therapy or a placebo (a treatment that looked and felt like the real thing but wasn't). Then the treatments were switched without the patients' knowing when they were getting the real thing. Those who had been getting the "juice" were now getting the phony treatment, and vice versa. The results were impressive. When the patients were getting electromagnetic therapy, their headaches decreased from more than three per week to less than one.

- Hungarian researchers using magnetic therapy have reported an 88 percent success rate in treating tension headaches, a 68 percent response rate with cervical headaches, and a 60 percent positive response in patients suffering from migraines and headaches of psychogenic (emotional) origin.

Unfortunately, PEMF therapy is not approved for use in the United States. But it is currently being investigated at several prestigious universities and is used in Europe, Canada, the Bahamas, and Mexico.

## HOW TO USE MAGNETS

The simplest way to use magnets is to put them where it hurts. If your headache is pounding right above your right eyebrow, tape a magnet right over the area or wear a hat that has magnets sewn into it where they hit the right spots. Whenever possible, place the magnets directly on your skin. If you're taping magnets to the pained area and want to increase the strength, you can simply stack the magnets, literally setting one on top of the other.

You can also purchase stretchy wraps that contain magnets and can be wrapped around various body parts, or lie on a pillow or mattress cover that contains magnets. You can buy chair pads, jewelry, hats, and shoe insoles containing magnets. Remember though, the more wrapping or padding between the magnet and your painful area, the weaker the magnetic field and the more watered-down the effects.

Headaches may be related to blockages of the meridians or energy pathways governing the bladder, gallbladder, and large intestine, so the proper placement of magnets to unblock these meridians may help. Various healing arts therapists—including acupuncturists, acupressurists, chiropractors, massage therapists, and KHT practitioners—may use magnets this way.

You can even drink magnetic water (water that has been treated with magnets). It is supposed to enhance overall health and increase energy.

Magnets designed for healing come in two types: bipolar and unipolar. We're familiar with the bipolar ones: they have both the north and south ends. If you put such a magnet on your body, you're applying both the north and south magnetic field. Unipolar magnets are constructed so that only one side (north or south) faces the body, and the other side faces away.

Some enthusiasts say unipolar magnets are better; others argue for bipolar. Some say the north side of the magnet is more medicinal; others champion the south. The truth is, nobody knows. My best advice: experiment to find what works best for you. If you do use a unipolar magnet and one side doesn't appear to have effects, flip it over and try the other side.

## **ARE MAGNETS SAFE?**

Most experts believe that magnet use is safe most of the time, but you should avoid it if you're pregnant; taking medicines, herbs, or other substances that thin the blood; have any internal or external bleeding; have a pacemaker, a metal plate, metal screws, or any other metal items implanted in your body; or have epilepsy. Also, don't use magnets in conjunction with electric blankets or other electronics.

You're probably pretty safe just experimenting with magnets on your own, but practitioners of various healing arts may also integrate magnetic therapy into your sessions, especially if you request it.

PEMF therapy is another ball game, however. A California-based company called Pulsed Signal Therapy has clinics in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Tijuana, Mexico, should you be willing to travel and pay what is probably a hefty price. To find out more, contact Pulsed Signal Therapy at 881 Alma Real Drive, Suite 301, Pacific Palisades, California 90272; phone 1-888-459-2100; or visit their websites, [certifiedpst.com](http://certifiedpst.com) and [pstworld.com](http://pstworld.com).

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# Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

So many times, as that little devil inside my head used my brain as a punching bag, I wished I could somehow “close the door” on the pain. Head it off at the pass. Lock it out and toss away the key. And then, suddenly, I did it. I found a way to slam the physiologic “gate” on my headache pain.

Yes, believe it or not, there is a “pain gate” inside of you, and it regularly swings open and shut. You don’t feel it opening or closing, and you have no conscious control over it. But, often you *can* urge it to go one way or the other.

## CLOSING THE GATE ON PAIN

In the mid-1960s, two doctors first presented what they called the gate theory of pain. The idea was revolutionary but simple. Inside the spinal cord are large bundles of nerves through which all pain signals must pass. These nerve bundles are, collectively, the “gate.” They’re referred to as the gate because they don’t always let the pain signals

pass through. Sometimes they simply say, “Sorry, the gate’s closed” to the pain. This often happens in times of severe injury. The body may be extremely traumatized, but the victim will feel little or nothing because the body has “decided” that this is not the time or the place for pain—and the pain gates have slammed shut.

If there is such a pain gate, you may be asking, why do I have so many headaches? Or, at least, why I feel the pain of headaches so often? That may be because, more often than not, your pain gates are open. Like a twenty-four-hour fast-food restaurant, they just never seem to close.

Yet, the mechanism for opening and closing the gate is quite simple. Throughout the body, nerve bundles continually send the brain signals that say, “I’m touching something.” When these signals arrive at the gate, it may swing shut, meaning that the brain pays little attention to this routine information that requires no action. There are also nerve bundles that scream out, “I’m hurting.” When these signals arrive at the gate, they’re not ignored. The gate opens wide. This makes sense: the brain doesn’t want to be overloaded with “I’m touching something” messages, but it certainly does want to be notified of any threat or damage to the body.

Luckily, the “I’m touching something” signals travel faster than the “I’m hurting” ones. The trick, therefore, is to fool the body into sending out more and more of the first kind of signals. If enough of them get to the gate before the pain signals do, the gate may overload and slam shut, preventing the ouch signals from getting through. The result: you still have a headache, but you don’t know it! That is, the physiologic changes that signal a headache may be going on, but you aren’t aware of them because you don’t feel the pain.

You have probably already learned to close your gate, at least a teensy bit, during your headaches. Remember all those times you rubbed your head? Doing so sent touch signals racing along the nerve pathways to the gate. Of course, they weren’t very powerful signals, so they didn’t move the gate much, but that was your untutored, natural attempt to stop the pain.

## HOW TENS WORKS

One way to send lots of “I’m touching something” signals to the brain is to use transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS). It’s an ancient idea, if stone carvings from 3,500 years ago can be trusted. According to the carvings, which originated in Egypt circa 2500 B.C., electric fish or eels were used to zap pain patients with an electrical charge. This bolt of electricity caused both the “I’m touching something” and the “I’m hurting” nerves to send out their signals. But since the touch messages traveled faster, the pain gate slammed shut—and, presumably, the painless patients went home happy.

Luckily, we don’t use eels anymore. Instead, we deliver a mild electric shock via special battery-powered units that transmit low-dose, pulsating electrical currents to the painful area. You can control the intensity of the current with a dial, setting it high enough to encourage the closing of the gate, but not so high that it’s painful. It doesn’t hurt—you should feel a slight buzzing but no pain. For those who are helped by the procedure (and that’s not necessarily everybody), pain relief may begin after just one session. Many patients need many sessions. But the relief, once acquired, may last for several hours or days.

Numerous TENS devices have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and myriad clinics can hook you up to the painkilling juice. Thousands of case histories report success, and even a few studies have been done on the process. But, results of the studies are mixed. Some say that TENS is a good painkiller; others say it is not. That’s probably because the technique works better with certain types of pain and certain types of patients than with others.

## IF YOU WANT TO TRY TENS . . .

TENS is generally considered safe, if performed properly. But those with pacemakers should not use TENS. Pregnant women and people

with heart disease and epilepsy should receive treatments only under strict medical supervision. It's always best to check with your physician before beginning a TENS program.

You don't have to visit a physician every time you want to receive TENS treatment. You can get these treatments from certain chiropractors, naturopaths, and other healers. You can even buy your own portable TENS unit for use at home. But do see your doctor first to make sure that TENS is a viable treatment for your condition and that it won't interfere with any other health problems you may have. Your physician should also monitor the number and frequency of your treatments, the "dose" you receive, and any side effects—good or bad.

After receiving several treatments, if you think that TENS is benefiting you and you like the convenience of getting your treatments at home, consider renting a unit before you lay out any cold, hard cash. Buying a unit you don't use can be an expensive mistake.



# 23

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## **Bach Flower Remedies**

Back in the 1920s, a medical and homeopathic doctor named Edward Bach decided that the standard approach to medicine—diagnosing a physical problem, then offering a drug or other treatment—just wasn't enough. There had to be a deep-rooted reason why people became ill over and over again, as well as a way to treat more than just the symptoms and get to the heart of what was really going on.

The good doctor came to two conclusions. The first was that physical disease is rooted in mental and emotional distress. More specifically, he theorized that you become ill when your higher self, which strives for full realization, finds itself in conflict with the ego. The ego is that little voice in your head that tells you that you can do something, or that there's no point in trying, or that you're destined to suffer, and so on.

Bach's second realization was that one cannot truly heal another unless the treatment is based on the patient's unique personality makeup. In other words, a doctor has to go beyond the obvious and refrain from offering one-size-fits-all cures. The question was, how could a doctor reach inside a person and repair mental and emotional anguish—and how could it be done in a way that is unique and individualized for each patient?

Dr. Bach hit upon his solution while looking at dew-covered flowers. He decided that the subtle natural energy of flowers could help heal inner wounds, thus allowing the body to begin to heal itself. The natural energy could be captured in the form of each flower's essence. According to this theory, Dr. Bach developed Bach Flower Remedies, a series of flower-based liquids that are administered through massage or ingestion.

## HOW BACH'S REMEDIES WORK

Bach Flower Remedies are believed to work on the soul. The conflict between the higher self and the ego causes energy blockages on an emotional and spiritual level, and these blockages lead to physical disease. Each kind of flower (or, more correctly, each essence) vibrates at a particular energy frequency and can help break up the blockages and restore the body to health. These remedies aren't designed to cure headaches; instead, they're meant to help resolve the physical distress caused by the higher body-ego conflict. The idea is that restoring the inner balance should cause the physical symptoms to disappear.

The remedies are made in two ways: either flowers are left to soak in water for a few hours, or flower-bearing twigs are boiled in water. Either way, the water is then mixed with brandy as a preservative.

## BACH'S REMEDIES FOR HEADACHES

Working intuitively, Dr. Bach identified some thirty different flowers that he believed had healing effects. While he did not outline any set-in-stone prescriptions for various diseases, the flowers that may be helpful for headaches include the following:

- **Centaury**—For those who find it hard to say no to others, even when they know others take advantage of them. Centaury helps you find and follow your own path in life.

- **Cherry plum**—For those who worry that they are not able to govern their thoughts and actions, or those who say and do things that offend their own moral codes. Cherry plum helps you to find and trust your deep inner wisdom.
- **Holly**—For those who feel unloved or are plagued by envy. Holly helps you develop the ability to love and feel loved.
- **Hornbeam**—For those who think that it's just too hard to get through a typical day. Hornbeam helps you become more lively mentally and develop more enthusiasm.
- **Mimulus**—For those who have a fear of heights, disease, or death. Mimulus helps you overcome your fear and be patient with others who also fear.
- **White chestnut**—For those whose minds are plagued by unnecessary and unwanted worries. White chestnut encourages you to govern your thoughts.

Other helpful Bach remedies include gentian, oak, red chestnut, pine, scleranthus, vine, and water violet. You can also try the Rescue Remedy, which is a combination of several flower essences, including rock rose, cherry plum, clematis, impatiens, and star-of-Bethlehem. It's used for emergency situations, shock, and stress and can help stabilize the emotions.

While you can use more than one remedy at a time, guard against taking so many that their actions become confused. Five or six at once is usually plenty. If your problem is deep-rooted, you may have to take the remedies for a while (say, a couple of months) before you see results.

## FINDING BACH FLOWER REMEDIES

Certain health food stores carry Bach Flower Remedies, and they are available for sale online. Prices vary, but you should be able to buy each remedy for around \$10. Contact Nelson Bach USA at 100

Research Drive, Wilmington, Massachusetts 01887; phone 1-800-319-9151 or 978-988-3833; or visit their website, [nelsonbach.com](http://nelsonbach.com).

Books and audiotapes are also available from the Dr. Edward Bach Centre at Mount Vernon, Bakers Lane, Sotwell, Oxon, OX10 0PZ, United Kingdom; phone 44 (0) 1491 834678; or visit their website, [bachcentre.com](http://bachcentre.com).

# 24

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## Aromatherapy

Like its cousin herbal medicine, aromatherapy is a healing art based on the health-enhancing substances found in plants. But unlike the herbalist, who recommends that you eat certain plants or drink their teas, the aromatherapist invites you to inhale the healing aromas produced by concentrated extracts taken from various herbs, flowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees. These extracts, called essential oils, produce different reactions in the body and have been used to heal both body and mind for thousands of years. Some essential oils help clear congestion or heal wounds; others have antimicrobial, antifungal, or antiseptic properties. Still others help regulate the blood pressure or rev up the circulation. And many are known for their psychological effects, bringing about a sense of euphoria, calmness, excitement, or sedation.

In true aromatherapy, the essential oils of various medicinal plants are extracted via steam distillation, peel pressure, or solvent extraction. The result is a very concentrated, aromatic scent filled with organic compounds that have positive effects on the human body, mind, and emotions. Unfortunately, the term *aromatherapy* has become pretty watered down in recent years, with cosmetics companies seeming to slap it on any product that smells remotely like a plant. But synthetic smells simply don't contain the same healing

effects as essential plant oils, with their high potency and tiny molecules that make them easy to absorb through the bronchial passages and skin into the bloodstream. So don't expect that 99¢ bottle of lavender-scented lotion you bought at the grocery store to produce the same relaxing results as inhaling the aroma of lavender essential oil. If you want to reap the benefits of aromatherapy, go the whole nine yards and buy the highest-quality essential oils from a reputable source (an accredited aromatherapist). You'll probably find that it's worth the price.

## HOW TO USE ESSENTIAL OILS

You can inhale the healing aromas of essential oils in several ways:

- Inhale the steam created by a few drops of essential oil mixed into a pot of boiling water. Let it cool a bit before inhaling, and put a towel over your head and the pot to keep the steam from escaping.
- Put a few drops of essential oil into the water used in a humidifier, or use a diffuser or nebulizer to create an aroma that permeates the whole room.
- Buy a portable inhaler (it looks like a tube of lipstick), and take a sniff whenever the urge strikes.
- Mix a few drops of oil with a carrier oil (sesame or soybean oil), and use it as massage oil.
- Add some essential oil to a hot bath and relax. Candles and soothing music add to the enjoyment.
- Add a drop of jasmine essential oil to a cup of hot tea and sip this fragrant drink.

Borrowing from the ancient theory that the universe—and everything in it—is made up of a blend of yin and yang, many aromatherapists use the yin and yang properties in aromas to help balance

the body. Yin is the female principle, cold and dark, while yang is the male principle, hot and light. These two opposing yet complementary principles are found in everything in the universe, including our bodies. But they must be kept in balance.

Careful selection of aromas can help restore yin and yang balance within the body. If, for example, your internal scales have tipped in favor of yin, they may disrupt the flow of energy (qi) and cause disease. By using a yang aroma, you may be able to restore balance and give your body a chance to heal itself. While most aromas are not entirely yin or yang, they will tend to be more of one than the other, giving them either yin or yang properties overall.

## AROMAS FOR HEADACHES

The following list identifies the essential oils commonly used to treat headaches, their special qualities, and their yin or yang predisposition.

- **Cardamom**—A yang scent with a sweet and spicy aroma, cardamom helps relieve headaches and strengthen the entire body.

- **Chamomile**—The flowers of the English (also called Roman) chamomile plant have a gentle sedative action that relaxes the body and is useful for relieving tension headaches, irritability, depression, and anxiety. Chamomile also relaxes the smooth muscles of the intestine, making it a good remedy for migraine-related nausea. A cup of chamomile tea before bedtime can help lull you to sleep, but the aroma is also very effective in a warm bath. Chamomile is a yin aroma.

- **Lavender**—Well-known for its ability to encourage relaxation, ease muscle spasms, relieve pain, lift depression, and tone the nervous system, lavender (a yang aroma) is a popular remedy for headaches and migraines, as well as the anxiety and insomnia that often accompany them.

- **Marjoram**—As popular with chefs as it is with aromatherapists, this savory yang scent is used to relieve tension headaches, migraine headaches, and the resultant insomnia.

- **Peppermint**—A yang aroma, peppermint is able to relieve pain, prevent muscle spasms that can contribute to tension headaches, and strengthen the nervous system.

- **Rose**—An antidepressant with sedative and general tonic properties, rose is a yin aroma used for PMS headaches and insomnia.

- **Rosemary**—An early favorite of European herbalists, this yang aroma is useful for treating hangover headaches, improving circulation, and strengthening blood vessels.

## AROMAS FOR MIGRAINES

Many of the aromas used for general headache relief are also used to treat migraines; these include chamomile, lavender, marjoram, peppermint, and rosemary. But the following aroma may be even more effective:

- **Basil**—This savory yang aroma helps restore balance to the nervous system, which is a vital part of combating the stress that accompanies migraines. Basil also strengthens the mind, clarifies thought, and banishes intellectual fatigue. Caution: pregnant women should not use basil.

- **Eucalyptus**—Taken from one of the world's tallest trees, eucalyptus (a yin aroma) is a painkiller useful for treating migraines or sinus headaches, especially when used in conjunction with peppermint.

- **Melissa**—A lemon-scented yang aroma, melissa works against migraines both directly and indirectly by combating the tension that can bring them on, as well as the nausea and depression that can accompany them.



Be cautious in using aromatherapy for migraines. Use aromatherapy *only* at the onset of the attack. Odors inhaled later may increase severity of the migraine and bring on nausea.

## AROMAS TO QUELL ANXIETY

Anxiety has gone hand in hand with headaches since the beginning of time, creating one of the world's oldest vicious circles—anxiety brings on headaches, headaches bring on more anxiety, and so on. But inhaling the aromas of certain herbs can markedly decrease anxiety while increasing a sense of tranquility and a feeling that all's right with the world. Chamomile, lavender, marjoram, melissa, and rose (listed in the previous sections) belong to this class, along with the following essential oils:

- **Benzoin**—A sedative with a vanillalike aroma, benzoin was used in ancient times to scare off evil spirits. Today it's put to work soothing emotional stress and strain and the general turmoil of life that can contribute to all kinds of headaches. Benzoin is a yang aroma.

- **Bergamot**—Able to ease tension and lift the mood, bergamot (a yang aroma) has a sweet, citrusy scent that is used to treat anxiety and depression.

- **Camphor**—The penetrating odor of camphor helps soothe anxiety and lift depression. It is also helpful in easing the congestion associated with sinus headaches. Camphor is a yin aroma. Caution: do not take camphor internally.

- **Cypress**—A yin scent with a nutty, woody aroma, cypress is a sedative with tension-relieving properties.

- **Geranium**—A fresh-scented aroma with yin properties, geranium lifts the mood, helps soothe away anxiety, and strengthens the entire body.

- **Jasmine**—A sweet, flowery aroma with yang properties, jasmine is an antidepressant.

- **Neroli**—Also known as orange blossom, neroli is a yang aroma helpful in relieving depression and anxiety.
- **Patchouli**—Used for the depression and anxiety that may cause or be caused by recurrent headaches, this yang aroma smells something like an old, musty attic. It stimulates the nervous system and, according to legend, increases sexual desire.
- **Sandalwood**—A yang scent, mild-smelling sandalwood helps relieve the anxiety and depression that often accompany ongoing headaches. It's also used to boost the immune system.
- **Ylang-ylang**—A yin aroma, this sweet, exotic-smelling scent helps ease anxiety and insomnia. It also helps increase an overall feeling of well-being.

## FINDING A QUALIFIED AROMATHERAPIST

Be careful when looking for an aromatherapist, and remember that aromacology is not the same thing as aromatherapy. It's a closely related healing art that uses manufactured scents, not essential oils taken from the real plants. To true aromatherapists, this is heresy. To find a qualified aromatherapist, contact the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy at P.O. Box 17622, Boulder, Colorado 80308; or phone 303-258-3791.

# 25

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## **Get the Right Amount of Sleep**

Sleep—what a wonderfully refreshing way to end one day and begin another! Sleep rests and restores our bodies and minds. When we don't get enough of it, fatigue, irritability, distraction, mood shifts, distorted thinking, blurred vision, and headaches can become our lot. Indeed, lack of sleep or fatigue is a common migraine trigger, especially in children. And those whose work schedules are subject to radical changes (for example, working the day shift, then switching to nights) often suffer from migraines until their bodies make the adjustment. So it seems obvious that a good way to prevent headaches is to make sure you get enough sleep, no matter what is going on in your life.

But, it can be equally important to guard against oversleeping. Getting too much sleep is another migraine trigger. That extra hour or two on Sunday morning may be doing you more harm than good. If you're tired, try napping in the afternoon if possible, but for no longer than an hour. A longer nap might interfere with your regular sleep schedule and leave you counting sheep until the wee hours.

## GUIDELINES FOR SLEEPING WELL

To regulate your sleeping schedule and get the most out of your time in bed, consider the following guidelines:

- **Figure out how much sleep you need every night.** We've always heard that we need eight hours of sleep per night, but in reality, everybody's sleep needs are different. My husband is a bona fide nine-hours-a-night kind of guy, whereas my friend Bruce insists he doesn't feel well if he gets more than seven hours of sleep. The amount of sleep you need is whatever it takes to make you feel rested, refreshed, alert, and ready to face the day. Once you know what you need, organize your life to make sure you get it.

- **Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.** This may be harder than it sounds. If you have to drag yourself out of bed at 6:30 every weekday morning to get to work on time, you're probably not going to want to get up at that hour on the weekends. But if you let yourself sleep until 8:00 or 9:00 A.M., you'll be throwing off your body's internal clock. Because you won't feel tired, you'll probably end up going to bed later than you should on Sunday night (or lying in bed for hours unable to fall asleep). And on Monday, chances are good that you'll develop a headache due to fatigue. Try to stick to a regular sleep schedule, even on weekends. If you're tired, take a short nap in the afternoon, but go to bed and get up at your usual times whenever possible.

- **Wind down for about an hour before retiring.** When I was working a nine-to-five, Monday-through-Friday office job, I used to run around on Sunday nights preparing for the week, making and freezing sandwiches, parcelling out vitamins, packing my office bag, doing laundry, ironing clothes, and so forth. I was always superbusy right up until my 11:00 P.M. bedtime, when I'd fall into bed exhausted. But guess what? I couldn't sleep. I finally realized that I couldn't force my body to jam around at ninety miles per hour, then leap into bed and drop off immediately. It just doesn't work that way.

I reorganized my Sundays so that my preparation work was done in the afternoons. In the evening, I was free to take a nice long bath, do some yoga, talk to my husband, and read a little. Then when 11:00 P.M. rolled around, I was ready to turn off the light and sink into a blissful sleep.

- **Avoid drinking alcohol before bedtime.** Alcohol may make you feel sleepy, but it actually robs you of shut-eye by disrupting normal sleep patterns. Since it's also a known headache trigger, it's best to avoid it at all times, not just before bed.

- **Eat a light snack about an hour before bedtime.** A glass of warm milk and a high-carbohydrate snack, like a piece of toast or some graham crackers, can help induce sleep. But avoid eating a heavy meal or drinking lots of liquids before retiring. The digestive process and the subsequent trips to the bathroom can disrupt your sleep.

- **Stay away from caffeine.** Coffee, black tea, soda, chocolate, and cocoa all contain caffeine, a stimulant that can keep you awake long after you should have eased off into Slumberland. If you indulge in caffeinated beverages, do so only in the morning and early afternoon. After 2:00 P.M., switch to the decaffeinated variety.

- **If you nap, do so with caution.** Many elderly people fall into an insomnia trap by taking several catnaps during the day, thus disrupting their sleep during the night. If you're really tired, take one short nap (sometimes even ten minutes can refresh you) in the afternoon. Don't nap in the morning or evening, and don't sleep for more than one hour. You want to feel nice and tired at the end of the day so sleep will come easily.

- **If you can't sleep, get up.** This is a hard one, but it's absolutely necessary. If you've been in bed for more than a half hour and haven't fallen asleep yet, get up and go do something monotonous, like folding laundry. Don't do anything that's too mentally taxing, like writing a report, and try to relax while you're doing it. Reading or watching TV is fine, but not while in bed. Sit up and wait for fatigue to set in (you want that). Then, when you feel really tired, go back to bed and try again. If you still can't sleep, repeat the process.

- **Don't use your bed as an office, playroom, or dining room.**

If you eat, play with your kids, or tackle your office work in bed, your bed will become associated with activity rather than rest. But if you use your bed only for sleeping, your mind and body will automatically shift into sleep mode once you hit the mattress. Make your bedroom a sanctuary of peace, and reserve your bed for two things only: sleeping and making love.

- **Turn your clock toward the wall.** If you're waiting for sleep to come or have suddenly awakened in the middle of the night, one of the worst things you can do is check the clock. It's an immediate anxiety producer. "Oh no," you'll probably think. "I've been lying here for forty-five minutes, and it's not happening." Or, "Shoot, it's 3:00 A.M., and I probably won't be able to fall asleep again." You don't need to know what time it is. Either don't look at the clock, or turn it toward the wall. Time will pass at its own speed, and one thing is for sure: you'll have to get up soon enough.

## MAKE YOUR BEDROOM SLEEP-CONDUCTIVE

If you have a problem getting to sleep or staying asleep, take a look at your sleeping environment. First, check out your mattress. Is it so soft that your back bows when you lie on it? Or so hard that you feel like you're lying on cement? How about your mattress cover? A good one will allow the sharp angles of your body (ankles, knees, elbows) to sink in, so they aren't subject to pressure or friction.

Your pillow can make a huge difference. If it's either too soft and flat or too hard or fluffed-up, you may be putting a strain on your neck. Many chiropractors recommend using a cervical pillow—one that's shaped like a cylinder and supports the back of your neck. Experiment to find the pillow that feels best to you.

Is your bedroom noisy? Do you hear traffic, noisy birds, kids playing, or gardeners using their leaf blowers? Try a white-noise machine

or a fan to create a steady background noise that can muffle or obliterate sleep-disturbing noises.

How about the temperature? A bedroom that's either too hot or too cold can interfere with a sound sleep. Most people like a fairly cool temperature (between fifty-five and sixty-five degrees) with a warm blanket.

Does sunlight shining through your window wake you up too early or give you a headache? Many migraineurs find that bright early-morning light instigates an early-morning migraine. Consider heavy drapes or blackout shades so you can decide when and how much light will be allowed into your bedroom.

Establishing good sleep habits takes some effort, but they can pay big dividends in terms of your health, comfort, and sanity as the years roll by. Even if sleeping problems don't seem to be the cause of your headaches, paying attention to these "sleep rules" is an excellent idea.

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# Afterword

If you've got headaches, you should consider yourself lucky. Yes, lucky—because out of all the painful conditions that doctors and pain clinics see, headaches have the best chance of being treated successfully. And lucky because there are so many different things you can do to prevent, manage, and treat the problem.

You'll probably have to sift through the clues and try a myriad of remedies before figuring out what works. Then you'll need to exercise self-discipline, patience, and diligence as you put new principles into practice. But rest assured that many of the remedies in this book can help you. They're like the genie in the bottle, just waiting for your command.

To sum up some of the most important tips for headache prevention and treatments, I've made up a few lists. You may want to copy the lists that apply to you and tack them up in front of your desk at work, on the refrigerator at home, and anywhere else you'll be able to see them often.

## **To Prevent Migraine or Tension Headaches**

- Reduce and/or relieve stress.
- Use relaxation techniques, including biofeedback.
- Avoid food triggers.
- Abstain from alcohol.
- Stop smoking.
- Eat regularly to maintain blood sugar levels.
- Taper off on caffeine intake.
- Adopt a regular sleep schedule; don't get too little or too much sleep.

- Stay away from cigarette smoke, perfume, and other odors.
- If your headaches are hormonally related, consider taking vitamin B<sub>6</sub> and magnesium supplements.
- Limit your time on the computer.
- Avoid bright and flickering lights; wear sunglasses outdoors.
- Exercise regularly.
- Cleanse the colon.
- Prevent motion sickness by riding in the front seat of the car and stopping frequently.
- Take recommended supplements.
- Improve your posture; consider chiropractic.
- Use an air ionizer if weather changes bring on your migraines.

### **To Treat Migraine or Tension Headaches**

- Use relaxation techniques.
- Apply an ice pack to your head or neck.
- Try other cold and hot therapies.
- Take a nap.
- Get a massage.
- Avoid bright and flickering lights; wear sunglasses outdoors.
- Try homeopathic or herbal therapy.
- Consider acupressure, acupuncture, or Korean hand therapy.
- Try magnets.
- Use TENS.

### **To Prevent Cluster Headaches**

- Avoid alcohol (even a little can trigger an attack).
- Avoid smoking or breathing secondhand smoke.
- Reduce or relieve stress.
- Use relaxation techniques, including biofeedback.
- Avoid excessive cold or heat, if possible.
- Avoid bright or flickering lights; wear sunglasses outdoors.

## To Treat Cluster Headaches

The pain is usually too intense to respond to the more indirect methods, like relaxation exercises. You want relief right now. Try the following:

- Inhale pure oxygen.
- Apply an ice pack to your head or neck, or use heat if it feels better.
- Use a hot shower massager on the scalp.
- Avoid alcohol (it can greatly increase the severity of the attack).
- Avoid MSG, aged cheese, cured meats, and chocolate, which also can increase severity.

Headaches are one of our most common ailments, and they can drain the joy out of our lives, robbing us of productivity, sleep, family time, happiness, and a sense of well-being. Luckily, there is much we can do to stop headaches in their tracks. By taking a good long look at the way we live and making some positive lifestyle changes, we can conquer—or at least diminish—the pain and reclaim our lives.

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