What Research Says About Migraines and Diet

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

Essential Foods for Migraines

Most individuals who suffer from migraine headaches are aware that certain foods, such as processed meats, often trigger migraine pain. What many people don't realize is eating well is a key aspect of migraine prevention, and there are many foods for migraines that can reduce the frequency and severity of them.

Food Allergies and Sensitivities Trigger Migraine Headaches

Migraines are frequently triggered when a food allergy or sensitivity is present. While a true allergy produces noticeable symptoms, you may be suffering from food sensitivity without realizing it.

The effect may be very subtle if you have a mild sensitivity reaction. In fact, the only symptom you may have is a migraine.

If you think food sensitivity is creating migraines, eliminate the offending food from your diet. You may be able to consume it in small amounts or once in a while without reacting. Keeping a migraine headache journal listing your intake of foods, stressors, activities, and the presence or absence of headaches can be very helpful for identifying offenders.

Eat Fresh, Clean Food and Suffer from Fewer Headaches

The best diet for migraine sufferers is one that is tasty, clean, simple, and supportive of the health of your nervous and circulatory systems. A healthy diet regulates neurotransmitters, which are chemicals in your brain that reduce pain, enhance emotional wellbeing, and communicate with the rest of your cells so your entire body functions optimally.

A simple diet comprised of organic whole foods can be very helpful. Many migraines are triggered by often unknown chemical compounds, so if you eat a simple diet of clean foods you are less likely to be exposed to chemicals found in pesticides, preservatives and fertilizers.

Feed Your Nervous and Circulatory Systems

Brain circulation, natural chemicals, and the brain itself are impacted by migraine headaches. Ensuring your circulatory and nervous systems are healthy not only enhances brain function and decreases headache pain, it aids every function of your entire body. Eating well is the primary way you can ensure brain, circulatory system and overall wellness.

Complex Carbohydrates Are Essential Nutrients for Brain Health

Many people suffer from headaches if their blood sugar levels are too low or if they are elevated. Complex carbohydrates help eliminate wide swings in blood glucose levels, prevent mood swings, relieve anxiety and decrease irritability. They also provide a steady flow of energy your body needs, as well as ward off feelings of hunger.

The best complex carbohydrates are foods high in fiber, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, seeds and nuts.

High fiber foods aid detoxification of the body. Our bodies are exposed to and create toxins every second of the day. By eliminating toxins you may be able to decrease the frequency of migraines, helping your body and mind function more efficiently.

Whole grains, dried beans, peas and lentils contain ample amounts of the B complex vitamins, which soothe the entire nervous system. Foods rich in B vitamins prevent insomnia, depression, and fatigue, all of which make migraine pain more unbearable. Meat, fortified grains, cereals, bread and eggs are good sources of B complex vitamins too.

Fatty Acids are Essential for Brain and Circulatory Health

Fatty acids and their effects on the health of the nervous and circulatory systems have been studied for decades. While some conclusions are conflicting, it is known that essential fatty acids reduce inflammation, enhance mood and reduce pain — all of which are important when suffering with migraine.

Healthy fatty acids may be obtained from fish, a traditional brain food. Obtain omega-3 and other essential fatty acids from wild caught ocean fish; mackerel, sardines, salmon, halibut and herring are the best sources.

Farm raised fish are not as clean as ocean caught fish, so they do not provide the same healing benefits. If you don’t want to eat fish, include canola, flax, hemp, or walnut oils and seeds in your diet.

Micronutrients Enhance Brain and Nervous System Health

Selenium is a micronutrient that boosts energy levels and stabilizes mood, and is found in whole grains, nuts, meat, seafood, mushrooms, onions and broccoli.

Calcium, magnesium, and the B vitamins help relieve stress and reduce irritability of all of the tissues within the body, including those in the brain and bloodstream. Eating a wide variety of foods ensures you consume adequate amounts of these important nutrients. Calcium may be obtained from dairy products, dark green vegetables, whole grains and fortified foods.

Foods containing high levels of vitamin C may reduce the intensity of a headache if consumed when a migraine begins. Try drinking orange juice, eating strawberries or a sweet pepper the next time that you have a migraine. Better yet, make a smoothie with these ingredients.

Getting a Migraine? Have a Drink

Dehydration can cause a migraine. Make sure you consume adequate amounts of fluids every day.

Other than water, one of the best drinks you can consume if you get a migraine is ginger tea. If you need a portable alternative, carry some candied ginger root with you.

Ginger is about as effective as the prescription medication Sumatriptan, when used to relieve migraine headache pain. As an added bonus, this herb relieves nausea, which often accompanies migraine headaches.

While ginger tea can work very well if you drink it when you get a headache, it works even better when consumed on a regular basis. Have two or three cups of the tea every day; simply add one teaspoon of fresh or dried ginger to a cup of boiling water. Cover the cup and let the tea steep for 20 minutes, then remove the cover and drink the

tea.

Caffeine can help relieve migraines, and many medications used to treat migraine headaches contain it. Try a cup of coffee or strong black tea the next time you get a migraine and see if it helps you.