Finding Migraine Relief: What Are the Options?

by JAIME SANDERS

How to Find Migraine Relief

When it comes to alleviating the pain and symptoms associated with migraine, there are many avenues one can take. Treating migraine can be a very integrative process.

In this article, we will talk about traditional pain relievers as well as natural ones most commonly used to treat migraine.

Migraine Medications

Migraine medications fall into one of two categories – preventatives and abortives.

- Preventative migraine medications are taken daily to help prevent migraine attacks from occurring.
- Abortive migraine medications are taken when a migraine presents itself to stop or abort the migraine. The earlier these are taken the better they work at stopping the migraine.

There are no drugs on the market that specifically target and prevent migraines, however, certain blood pressure medications, anti-seizure drugs, antidepressants, and some herbals have been shown to help in migraine prevention.

There are numerous medications that have been used off-label as a preventative for migraine.

The following list of drugs have been recommended by the American Headache Society and American Academy of Neurology (AAN) based on their proven effectiveness in controlled clinical trials:

- Divalproex sodium/sodium valproate
- Topiramate (Topamax)
- Metoprolol (Lopressor, Toprol XL)
- Propranolol (Inderal)
- Timolol (Blocadren, Betimol)

Other medications that have been used to prevent migraine include the following:

- **ACE inhibitors:** Lisinopril (Prinivil/Zestril)
- **Angiotensin II receptor antagonists (ARBS):** Candesartan (Atacand)
- **Beta-blockers:** Atenolol (Tenormin), Nadolol
- **Calcium channel blockers:** Diltiazem (Cardizem LA), Nimodipine (Nimotop), Verapamil (Isoptin, Calan)
- **Tricyclic antidepressants:** Amitriptyline (Elavil), Nortriptyline (Nortriptyline Hydrochloride, Nortriptyline Hydrochloride Oral Solution, Pamelor), Imipramine, Doxepin (Silenor), Protriptyline (Vivactil)
- **Other antidepressants:** Paroxetine (Paxil), Fluoxetine (Prozac), Sertraline (Zoloft)

- **Anti-seizure medications:** Topiramate (Topamax), Gabapentin (Neurontin), Divalproex sodium (Depakote)
- **Herbals:** Feverfew, Butterbur, Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10), Magnesium supplements

Which Medications Are Used as Abortives?

Common medications used as an abortive for migraine include over-the-counter (OTC) medications

such as NSAIDs, analgesics, and caffeine, including:

- Aspirin
- Naprosyn (Naproxen, Anaprox, Anaprox DS)
- Acetaminophen
- Ibuprofen (Motrin)

Ergot alkaloids are strong medications that constrict blood vessels, something that OTC drugs do not do. The most commonly prescribed ergots are Cafergot (ergotamine tartrate) and D.H.E. 45 injection or Migranal Nasal Spray (dihydroergotamine mesylate).

Triptans target serotonin receptors, cause constriction of blood vessels, and interrupt the chain of chemical events that lead to a migraine. These include:

- Almotriptan (Axert)
- Eletriptan (Relpax)
- Frovatriptan (Frova)
- Naratriptan (Amerge)
- Rizatriptan (Maxalt, Maxalt—MLT)
- Sumatriptan (Imitrex, Zecuity)
- Zolmitriptan (Zomig, Zomig-ZMT)

Other types of medications used to abort a migraine include Midrin, which is a combination of isometheptene mucate (a vasoconstrictor), dichloralphenazone (a sedative), and the analgesic acetaminophen.

Antihistamines are also commonly used to ease migraine symptoms. Histamine, a substance that dilates blood vessels and causes inflammation in the body (a similar response caused by migraine), is counteracted with the use of an antihistamine.

Antihistamines are grouped into sedating and non-sedating types. Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) is a sedating antihistamine while loratadine (Claritin) is non-sedating.

Next page: Using essential oils for migraine relief.

What Essential Oils Help Migraines?

There have been several studies done that showed the benefits of popular essential oils as an alternative treatment to traditional therapies.

The use of less studied scents for migraines and headaches relies more on the knowledge gained through centuries of tradition. Ancient cultures like the Egyptians, Greeks, and Chinese practiced the use of essential oils.

Before using any essential oil, talk with your doctor first to go over any risks there may be by including them in your treatment plan. Some oils are not safe for pregnant or breastfeeding women, so check with your doctor before using any new oils.

Peppermint/Spearmint Oil

Peppermint oil has a long-lasting cooling effect on the skin, the ability to inhibit muscle contractions, and stimulates blood flow in the forehead (when applied topically).

If peppermint oil is too overwhelming, using spearmint instead can help. Spearmint has the same qualities as peppermint oil with a much subtler scent.

Lavender Oil

Lavender oil has many benefits. It works as a sedative, antidepressant, anti-anxiety, and calming agent as well as induces relaxation and relieves tension and stress. It can also help with feelings of restlessness and poor sleep and regulates serotonin levels which help minimize pain in the nervous system.

Eucalyptus Oil

Eucalyptus oil works as an expectorant – it helps to cleanse the body of toxins and harmful microorganisms. It opens the nasal airways and eliminates sinus pressure, which can contribute to headaches, and promotes emotional balance and boosts mood.

Rosemary Oil

Rosemary oil has been used in folk medicine to treat headaches and poor circulation because of its stimulating, anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties.

This essential oil has a calming effect and improves personal orientation and alertness. It reduces stress and emotional triggers that can cause headache attacks and aids in digestion and soothes an upset stomach which can be a symptom of a severe headache.

Chamomile Oil

Chamomile oil has many uses and benefits. There are two types of chamomile, the Roman Chamomile and German Chamomile. While Roman Chamomile is more soothing and calming, German Chamomile has a powerful anti-inflammatory agent.

Chamomile oil is used as a stimulant and anti-depressant, sedative, digestive aid, analgesic and antineuralgic, and a relaxant.

The German variety is more effective than the Roman variety in curing inflammation, reducing blood pressure and curbing the swelling of blood vessels. Both have analgesic properties, reducing pain in the joints and muscles, decreasing the severity of headaches, and relieving the severe pain of neuralgia.

Rose Oil

Stress is a common trigger for headaches. Learning how to reduce and alleviate stress in the mind and body can help in the management of migraine.

The comforting and soothing properties of rose oil can help ease the nervous system, reducing tension in the body that can lead to headaches. Rose oil encourages deep relaxation, which is beneficial when treating migraine and headaches.

Lemon Balm/Melissa Oil

Lemon balm or Melissa oil is used to treat many health conditions in traditional medicine, including insomnia, migraine, anxiety, hypertension, diabetes, and dementia. It calms the nerves in the brain which helps to ease the

pain caused by headaches and migraine.

Marjoram Oil

Marjoram oil is good fortifies and strengthens brain tissue, thus a great use for brain health. This oil reduces pain caused by inflammation, controls or calms muscle spasms, and provides feelings of calm and relaxation to help treat tension and anxiety.

Next page: More essential oils for migraine relief, foods that fight off migraines, and more.

Jasmine Oil

If your migraine is not triggered by stress or anxiety, then Jasmine oil may be of benefit to you. Using it outside of a migraine attack may cause you to feel more anxious than normal and can trigger an attack.

Jasmine oil can help stimulate mood and reduce depression, making you more alert and energetic.

When migraine symptoms have you feeling lethargic, run down, or low in energy (i.e. during the prodrome or “migraine hangover” stage), jasmine oil can “wake you up” and give you much needed energy.

Clary Sage Oil

Clary sage has many health benefits attributing to its properties as an antidepressant, sedative, anticonvulsant, digestive aid, antiseptic, antibacterial and antispasmodic. It helps to ease menstrual cramps and reduces stress and anxiety.

With anxiety and menstruation being triggers for migraine, it can be a useful essential oil for women with migraine to use.

Sweet Basil Oil

For hormonal headaches, migraines, and digestive issues sweet basil oil may be of benefit. This can be helpful for treating menstrual migraine, nausea and upset stomach. Sweet basil oil also has antispasmodic properties which aid in the relief of muscle spasms and cramps.

Apply topically, diluted in a carrier oil, across the forehead, back of the neck through the shoulders, and on the temples or rub into the palms of your hands and inhaling, breathing slowly and evenly.

Carrier Oils

- Jojoba oil
- Sweet almond oil
- Avocado oil
- Magnesium oil
- Argan oil
- Coconut oil

Add five to ten drops, a tablespoon of carrier oil, and a cup of Epsom salts to a warm bath and soak for 20-30 minutes. Diffuse five drops in a room diffuser to reduce muscle tension, boost mood, aid sleep and relieve stress. If you do not own a room diffuser, place one to three drops onto a cotton ball or tissue, place near your nose and inhale.

Apply a few drops to a cold compress and use as normal. You must use a high-quality food-grade essential oil to take internally. Take one drop internally by adding it to tea, water or food when experiencing headache or

migraine attacks.

Meditation

Learning how to listen to and become in tune with our bodies is a huge benefit to managing and coping with a migraine. Through meditation, I have learned to lower my pain through breath and imagery.

Personally, it can be difficult for me to focus on a scene or thought while meditating. Instead, I imagine that I am breathing in white, healing light and letting go of my pain and discomfort while exhaling.

There are many free resources for meditation that you can use. My health insurance company offers meditation and guided imagery downloads for free on their website. You can also download apps for your phone to help you meditate regularly.

Find a quiet space in your home where you can go and not be disturbed and devote 10-15 minutes a day to become centered and one with your breath and body.

When you are not at home, guided affirmations can be used while at work, school, and even in the car. Meditation takes practice and patience, but when incorporated into your daily life it is an added benefit to your overall well-being. You will begin to feel a sense of control over your pain with daily meditation.

Acupressure

Acupressure is a great complimentary treatment for migraine. It offers quick relief when you are unable to get to your medications or if the migraine is mild enough to try to treat without them.

This technique uses pressure on specific pressure points to relieve pain. Here are four to try:

- **Draw an imaginary line between the middle of both ears to the top of your head using your finger.** This is a pressure point that commonly relieves headaches, as well as dizziness and low energy.
- **Move your finger from your shoulder to your neck until you feel a depression.** Apply pressure as needed in the area that is the most tender. This pressure point relieves migraine headaches as well as neck pain, shoulder tension, dizziness and stress.
- **Slide your finger to the place where your thumb and index finger meet.** You should be able to feel a depression in this pressure point. Pressure applied to this point treats headaches that are in the front of your head. It also treats general pain and cold symptoms like sneezing and a runny nose.
- **Locate the next point by placing your finger in the depression between your big toe and your second toe.** Feel where the tendons meet, then press where it is most sore. This will not only relieve migraine pain, but also anger, irritability, stress, menstrual pain and anxiety.

3 Migraine Relieving Foods

While you may be aware of the foods that trigger migraines, there are specific other foods that can actually help relieve migraines.

Foods Rich in Omega-3 Fatty Acids, EPA and DHA

Eating foods rich in Omega-3 fatty acids or taking them in supplement form may help reduce the severity and frequency of migraine attacks due to their anti-inflammatory compounds.

According to a University of Cincinnati study. In the study, 300mg of EPA and DHA and 700mg of other oils were used. Eating four 125g servings of fatty fish per week would provide the same amount of beneficial fish oils.

Ginger

Ginger is a great way to relieve nausea associated with migraine. It may also help relieve head pain due to the similarity of its compounds to NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs).

Boiling a few slices of ginger root and drinking the liquid a few times a day can help with nausea and pain. Eating ginger candy is also helpful.

Magnesium Rich Foods

Many people with migraine often have magnesium deficiencies, which is thought to make the brain more sensitive to triggers.

Eating foods high in magnesium, such as dark leafy greens, beans and whole grains, can help.

Try to get between 400 and 700 mg of magnesium per day. Pumpkin seeds, brazil nuts, and halibut are all high sources of magnesium.