How Holistic Migraine Treatment Could Improve Symptoms

by SARAH RATHSACK

The Importance of Taking a Holistic Approach With Migraine

Several years ago, I stopped being on preventative medication for my chronic migraine condition while planning to have a child. I wanted as little medication in my body while I was trying to conceive and knew I wouldn't be taking any while I was pregnant or nursing.

Over the years, I had tried dozens and dozens of preventatives to lessen my chronic daily migraines and never found one that fully worked.

Once I had children, I decided not to go back onto preventatives. I decided to live preventatively with a holistic approach. I will always need abortive medication to break a migraine, but find I have fewer complications by being off preventatives.

I tend to get side effects from medications and like how a holistic approach only makes me more resilient rather than weaker in another aspect of my health.

As with medication, I have had to find what works specifically for me. I still try many products and find that some work and some don't. Overall, I enjoy living preventatively rather than taking a pill that gives me side effects.

Food and Beverage

I drink a lot of water! Dehydration is a huge migraine trigger and filling myself with water helps keep me balanced.

Tea also has many holistic benefits. I avoid alcoholic beverages and sugary drinks. Over the years, I have become increasingly sensitive to wine and draft beer and no longer drink them.

I eat an anti-inflammatory diet as much as possible. Some find relief by cutting sugar, gluten or dairy. For me, it is about eating leafy greens, ginger, turmeric, and other foods that heal my gut.

Overly processed foods filled with chemicals inflame my body and trigger migraines, making it harder for my body to fight naturally.

Ice and Heat

Ice is the best natural treatment for my migraines. Some people cannot tolerate the cold, but my head needs ice to numb the pain. I wear ice packs on my head and freeze pressure and pain points in order to find relief.

Heating pads also help me. I use heating pads to warm my fingers and toes that get extremely cold during a migraine.

I also use a warm compress on my face when a migraine is triggered by sinus pressure. The warmth loosens the congestion in my face, which relieves pressure and pain.

Heating pads are also used to soothe sore neck and shoulder tension. I have a lot of muscle tension in those areas and using a heating pad to warm the muscles and then stretching to loosen them really helps.

Essential Oils

Essential oils for migraine work differently for everyone. High-quality oils can be ingested, diffused, used topically and more. All of these methods should be researched and done carefully under the care of a professional.

I prefer using essential oils by diffusing them. It is the safest way to receive the benefits naturally and is safe for children and pets to be around.

I use a diffuser all throughout the house. Although I am really sensitive to smell and often can't stand perfume, I have found oils that work for me.

My mood, pain level, and the time of day determine the oil that I use; a variety is needed for my variety of life.

I also use peppermint (with a carrier oil) topically on pressure points. I use a roll-on applicator on my wrists, temples and occipital region.

Peppermint should not be used directly on the skin. Once again, research the types of oils that may benefit you, speak with a professional and find your path to using essential oils in the best way to treat your condition.

Exercise and Meditation

For many, exercising triggers migraines, yet for others it relieves them. For me, it's a combination of both.

I find that preventatively, yoga, Pilates and gentle stretching helps my body stay flexible, releases tension, and improves my moods. High-impact activities do not work for me and inflame my head, triggering a migraine.

Next page: Sarah shares more of her favorite holistic migraine treatments.

Exercise and Meditation

Walking is another way to clear my head emotionally while raising endorphins.

Mediation and self-talk allow me to deal with the pain migraines give me each day. Putting myself in a space that focuses on peace, calm and an "I can do it!" attitude is crucial — it allows me to feel like I have some control on how I deal with the pain.

I may not be able to escape it, but knowing how emotionally to deal with it makes it more tolerable and less lengthy. A positive attitude with such a negative disease allows me to live a better quality of life mentally.

Baths and Massage

Many people are magnesium deficient. Migraine sufferers tend to be part of this group and baths are a great way to help holistically.

Epsom salt baths allow the skin to absorb magnesium, therefore treating the deficiency naturally. Finding time to soak in a hot bath to loosen muscles, meditate, and relax in an Epsom salt bath is a way to treat my body and mind with the time it needs to recover and prevent migraine flares.

Massage for migraines is a way to prevent muscle tension that may trigger one. Having the shoulders, neck, and arms massaged allows the upper body to release tension and become more flexible and able to move. After a massage the body may feel looser, more relaxed and flush toxins from the body that may be causing inflammation.

Acupuncture

Recently I began acupuncture. Tiny needles are placed in my shins, hands, and ears depending on my pain locations. I find it to be fascinating and helpful so far.

Although acupuncture and massage are beneficial, insurance does not cover them. Holistic approaches are not always cheap, as with medication. Finding a balance financially of what is needed and what is possible should be considered when choosing what holistic approach to use.

Environment

Knowing your triggers and setting up your environment to respect that is important. Light, sound, smell, and stress are all triggers for me.

At work, I wear indoor glasses and turn off fluorescent lights. I use lamps and diffused natural light to light my room. I also turn down the brightness on my computer and technology.

I am aware that extended amounts of screen time will stress my eyes. I wear sunglasses and hats when I am outdoors.

I avoid noises that will trigger me and ask people around me to be respectful of perfumes. Smell is a major trigger and being around someone who smokes or has bathed in perfume makes me sick. Being honest with coworkers and family members about my sensitivities is helpful.

Stress at work and in life makes everyone sick. For a migraine sufferer, being able to handle stress or avoid it is a part of life.

I have learned that by using some of the techniques above (meditation, baths, exercise, self-talk, etc.) have allowed me to deal with stress better. I changed my occupation in order to avoid the onslaught of stress that it was giving me and found a job that was more conducive to my life.

Overall, living a holistic preventative life has been more beneficial to me than when I was on preventative medication.

I found that when I was taking a preventative medication it would work for a while and then stop. I also had many side effects such as weight gain, moodiness, hair loss, stomach issues, cognitive issues including memory loss, and more.

While living preventatively, I find that I only feel better when I am treating my body with the respect and love that it needs. It is an ongoing battle and much more difficult than taking a pill.

I find that living a holistic life has motivated me to get a sense of how I’m feeling and direct my lifestyle to fit that. My goal has been to take less medication and increase the quality of life, which I have done.

I have not gotten rid of migraine but by living this way I have taken control of them in a way that will last a lifetime.

How do you take a holistic approach to treating migraine?