Stress Levels Could Impact Migraine Pain

by ERIC PATTERSON

Stress and Migraines

Migraines hurt. Migraines are stressful. The interaction between stress and migraines is a delicate one to balance as the pain triggers stress and the stress triggers pain. The pain associated with migraines puts your body in a state of emergency, as you will do anything to reduce the pain. Desperation can provoke highly useful behaviors or decisions that only focus on instant relief.

When you are experiencing pain, you are not performing at your best and aspects of your life that need attention are ignored in the name of instant gratification. In the short-term, this is not problematic as you can quickly pickup where you left off after a day or two. In the long-term, ignoring part of your life becomes neglecting part of your life. Neglecting something is one of the best ways to ensure that it becomes awkward and dysfunctional.

7 Aspects Affected

Consider the example of dominoes lined up on edge. You have worked hard throughout your life to line up and organize the dominoes in a particular way. What took you years to organize, hangs in peril as any move can undo your progress. Migraines push the first domino over which bumps the next domino. Soon, each domino falls systematically so they are all laying flat on the floor.

The reach of migraine knows no bounds as they can affect almost every aspect of your life. To limit the unwanted impact, you must gain awareness of the situations, identify where and when migraines influence you and find appropriate, healthy coping skills to counteract the undesirable influence of migraine.

Physical Health

The most obvious impact of migraines is quite possibly the most severe. Even with the best treatment, migraines can be extremely painful and completely debilitating. Some people with migraines have pain centered to specific areas of their head while others report widespread pain throughout their body. People that suffer from migraine with aura experience distorted visuals that further add to the negative incident.

To address the physical, consult your doctor. There are multiple medications available to you that limit the impact of your next migraine, improve symptoms once they have begun and extend the periods between incidents. Be open, direct clear with your doctor so he can better understand your symptoms. Keeping a migraine journal will provide you and the doctor with useful information.

If you are finding limited success with your doctor, looking into alternative treatments including natural remedies and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) may prove useful. These encompass many treatments options that have benefited many people over the years. Some swear by using an herb, vitamin, root or tea to treat their migraines. The good news is many of these remedies are readily available, affordable and side-effect free. CAM treatments include acupuncture, chiropractic, yoga and hypnosis. Some find meditation and relaxation

techniques beneficial in prevention and damage control situations.

Next page: impacts on your mental and spiritual health.

Mental Health

The physical health toll is large but potentially equaled by the mental health damage. People with migraines often report increased feelings of depression, anxiety and hopelessness associated with their symptoms. People feel trapped by their migraines as if they are a prisoner in their own home. Perhaps, you feel fearful about going into the community because you never know when the next migraine could strike. The lack of positive experiences only reinforces feelings of despair and pessimism as depression convinces you that symptoms will never improve.

Mental stress from migraines is common. Awareness and understanding is essential to combat the impact. Learn about depression and anxiety from trusted resources online or a mental health professional. Therapists and psychiatrists that recognize the connection between migraines and mental illness are available to you. You treat the physical, so why not treat the mental?

Be active by listing, exploring and engaging in familiar, positive experiences. Resist the urge to “rest” at home. Try new things, be adventurous, accomplish goals and change your thinking to improve your mental health. Don’t let your depression and anxiety trick you into staying close to home.

Spiritual Health

The hopelessness, fear and despair associated with depression and anxiety can reduce your spiritual health. People with a chronic medical condition, like migraines, often report questioning or losing faith in their spirituality. People wonder how could God give them such terrible, unrelenting pain. During times of crisis, faith is challenged, as your questions don’t seem to have answers.

People typically report that a strong spirituality is a benefit when dealing with any medical condition. If your faith and beliefs no longer seem to make sense to you, seek answers actively and directly from appropriate sources. Speak to your religious official and ask for his understanding of your situation. If this does not satisfy you, look for other explanations and other interpretations. Look outside of your previous affiliation if you find yourself feeling unfulfilled. The benefits of a strong feeling of spiritual health are worth exploring.

Social Health

The pain, depression and anxiety make it more difficult to leave the house. Not leaving the house makes it more difficult to maintain old and start new relationships. Your social health suffers as friends no longer think that you are invested in the relationship or that your inconsistency is not worth the benefit of the friendship. Functioning social health serves as protection for you against the risks associated with migraine.

Relationships are needed by all people but especially by those with a chronic medical condition. Communication is the key to maintaining friendships and making new ones. Assertively let your relationships know what you are going through and what they can do to help. As long as you present the information in a way that is respectful, realistic and honest, you will be more likely to extend the friendship. Clear communication is also effective for accurately defining the relationship. If you tell a friend that you need more encouragement to get out of the house when migraines strike and they have not done so, it is likely an indication that they are no longer interested in maintaining the relationship. The loss will still hurt but it is better than assuming they were your friend.

Next page: impacts on work, financial, and sexual health.

Work Health

The physical health aspect of migraines directly contributes to worse work/educational health. Migraines make it more difficult to attend work or school consistently and on time. Whenever you cannot think or see clearly, getting in the car and clocking in by 9 am or studying for your midterms are not your priority. The physical health must come first.

Some people feel too ashamed or guilty of their situation to communicate it effectively with their workplace or school. This tends to be a huge mistake. If you do not express your needs and limitations to others, there is no way for them to assist you in making modifications. If no modifications are made, you will not meet the demands of your positions. Knowing the trends of your symptoms will make it easier to know what modifications will be the most helpful. Do your migraines come in the morning? Ask for an afternoon shift at work. Do you have more episodes during the winter? Take a lighter class schedule during that semester.

Financial Health

The dominos continue to fall with financial health. When your work suffers, you financial health suffers. Having less money contributes to higher levels of stress. As you know, increased stress contributes to higher frequency and intensity of migraines.

Living within your means when you have migraines will be more crucial than for most people. Your employment could end unexpectedly due to your absence and finding new work is a challenge. Work to create a “migraine nest egg” that will serve as a reserve of money for times when money is limited. Additionally, people in pain may seek out retail therapy to ease symptoms. Retail therapy is fine in moderation but acts only as a distraction from the real issue.

Sexual Health

People tend to be sexual creatures but your migraines, depression and anxiety may push sex to an afterthought. Maybe you fear that sex will trigger an episode. Maybe you fear your partner is no longer interested in having sex with you.

Think again. Sex has been proven useful in limiting physical pain, decreasing emotional stress and improving quality of intimate relationships. Improving your sexual health will improve your physical health and overall well-being.

Conclusion

The best way to reduce the stress associated with migraines is to look how it is influencing each aspect of your life. Investigate the seven facets listed above to identify the risks, challenges and solutions. Work to find movement towards reducing the negatives and adding the positives. By doing so, migraines may be less of a pain.