Surviving the Autumn Weather of Migraine Season

by BARBARA LEECH

Coping With Fall Headache Season

For every season, I seem to seem to have specific migraine triggers.

Spring seems to bring me more than just melting snow and warmer weather – it also dishes out a dose of pollen, and the freshly cut grass my husband is so proud of can make the next three days unbearable for me.

Summer's heat and the occasional dehydration I accidentally let happen (I love iced coffee more than water) seems to be a trigger, and the end of summer signals the beginning of fall migraines for me, mainly because I am super sensitive to ragweed pollen.

It is an endless cycle of "always something" triggering my migraines, and fall seems to be a big headache season for me. Those beautiful, refreshing autumn breezes are behind the spread of mould spores, which may cause inflammation in the bronchial tubes, my sinuses and also trigger migraines. I am not alone.

A study published in *Science Direct*, which focused on migraines and sinus headaches, found that those who suffered from chronic migraines and who also suffered from hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, had more migraine attacks during what is known as the fall "headache season."

The study concluded that histamine in the body (in a reaction to an allergen), can cause nasal congestion in an area adjacent to the central nervous system, and act as a migraine trigger. So, it is recommended that taking an antihistamine medication may help for relieving migraines caused by fall allergies.

I have found this to help a bit (though I also get very drowsy or cannot concentrate while on these meds) but it doesn't stop this migraine trigger in its tracks every time.

How Does the Fall Weather Impact Migraines?

With more than 100 known migraine triggers out there, it is also believed that migraines are often caused by changes in temperature, dry weather, storms, or changes in barometric pressure. Studies indicate that seasonal migraines are linked with actual changes in brain chemistry, such as serotonin levels, which occur during certain times of year.

Let's face it, our regular activities, sleep patterns and daily obligations change based upon the seasons and often the weather. The best defense is to understand what is triggering your headaches and seek alternative coping mechanisms that help limit your fall migraine attacks.

Keeping track of these seasonal migraine triggers, trying to get regular hours of sleep, and taking medications for any seasonal allergies when symptoms first appear will all help in your migraine defense.

I also have read that changes in barometric pressure are a common migraine weather trigger. According to a study by The New England Center for Headache, often what we perceive to be seasonal allergy-related migraines are actually caused by *the changing of the weather.*

It is not the weather itself, but the fact that it is changing that serves as a trigger. The report sited that drops or increases in barometric pressure, changes in humidity (rain and dry days) and changes in temperature are all things that can trigger migraines.

Next page: back-to-school stress, and some tips for limiting fall headache season triggers.

Stress of Back-to-School

Do you get excited or nervous when you think about all the activities of fall and back-to school chaos? For many, fall weather migraines occur because of anxiety, tension, or apprehension that you may have about the coming months of activities and busy schedules.

My kids immediately start in with soccer practice and games and school open houses to attend. Between work and homework and, well everything, I miss summer so much it hurts… usually in my head in the form of a migraine.

I find myself trying every way possible to eliminate stress or worries about keeping everyone in the family on task once the school bell rings. Sadly, this is an annual problem, with my migraine headaches picking up their attacks every time the summer ends and the business of the school year kicks into overdrive once more.

Limiting Fall Migraine Triggers

- Make lists of tasks to do so you can stop stressing about what you are forgetting.
- Delegate tasks as much as you can.
- Accept that some things may not get done.
- Don’t take on (or commit to do) too much.
- Stick to a strict sleep schedule and avoid sleeping with your bedroom windows open.
- Make your home allergy-friendly by purchasing a HEPA filter and keeping sheets, pillows, clothes and furniture clean.
- Drink plenty of water, take anti-histamines and use a nasal spray
- Take supplements: vitamins and minerals such as riboflavin, magnesium, vitamin C and butterbur.
- Get a rice pack warmed up in the microwave, scent it with peppermint oil and place around your neck or on your forehead.
- Take a very hot shower and let the water hit on your shoulders and neck and top of your head then follow up with an icy cold pack from freezer on back of head and neck.

I work from home and my office has dark blue, light-blocking curtains and a comfy sofa for when my office chair is too uncomfortable and a more reclined position helps.

Sometimes pressure on certain points helps the pain. I bind my head very tightly with a long scarf, because the pressure can actually ease my headache, depending on where the pain is focused.

If my migraine is in full attack mode, my doctor has recommended I take three migraine pain relievers (like Advil Migraine) taken with a cold and caffeinated beverage, followed by lots of cold water, and finished with a couple of salty crackers or potato chips, which will take the edge off the pain and the nausea some of the time.

Your fall migraine preparation should also include a thorough cleaning of your house, keeping the windows closed during windy days, and using an air filter in your rooms to filter out allergens from the air you and your family breathe.

Set regular sleep schedules, let go of as much stress as possible, stay well-hydrated, and take something to curb any histamine response in your body to fall allergens. The more you do to prevent your migraine triggers the fewer attacks you may have this fall.