

Preventing Migraine

Migraine refers to a group of symptoms that may occur together. The most noted of these symptoms is headache. Other symptoms include nausea, visual changes and sensitivity to light or noise. Family members often have migraine too. *Ocular migraine* refers to visual symptoms alone, without a headache. Occurrences of migraine are strongly affected by outside factors such as diet and stress.

You'll probably get a migraine headache at times, even if you take good care of yourself. But there are some things you can do to reduce the number of migraines you get and keep the ones you do have from being as bad. Here are some things that can help.

Diet

- Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages. Red wine seems to be the worst offender, but any alcoholic drink may cause a migraine.
- Avoid monosodium glutamate (MSG). Sometimes it's called by other names, such as "hydrolyzed vegetable protein" or "natural flavorings." Be suspicious of all mixed spices or flavorings (like "seasoned salt"), all dry flavorful foods (like bouillon cubes) and all foods that are cheap and very spicy.
- Avoid nitrates and nitrites, which are contained in preserved meats, such as bacon, hot dogs or deli meat. For example, a turkey you cook yourself is fine, but sliced turkey breast from the supermarket may cause problems.
- If you use caffeine, spread your intake out evenly during the day. For example, have caffeine four times a day -- once with each meal and again at bedtime. Also, chocolate contains caffeine, so be careful of how much chocolate you eat.

Lifestyle

- Don't skip meals. If you can't eat a full meal, at least take a few minutes to have a glass of milk or juice and a piece of fruit or perhaps a breakfast bar.
- Keep a regular sleep pattern. Both less sleep or more sleep than usual can cause a migraine.
- Exercise regularly -- about every other day. Find an exercise you enjoy (such as jogging, bicycling or swimming). Exercise hard enough to get your heartbeat up for 20 minutes or longer.

Behavior

- Pace your activities. Recognize what has to be done today, and what can be put off until tomorrow.
- Set aside a 20-minute break for relaxation or prayer daily. Sit quietly with your eyes closed, let your muscles relax and give your mind a break from the normal stress of daily life.
- Learn some "mini-relaxations" to use when you can't fit in a full 20-minute relaxation break. This can help prevent the build-up of stress and tension.
- Resist unproductive worrying. Recognize the stress you can change, and change it, but don't get hung up on things you can't control.
- Learn to look for the warning signs that tell you a headache is coming (cold hands, tightness in your neck and shoulders, jaws clenched tightly, pressure in your temples). When you notice any of these signs, do something different (take a break, stretch out, etc.) to try to prevent the headache.