

# Taking Charge of Your Migraines

Migraines are individual and consequently it is necessary to communicate the specifics of your migraine to your doctor. The more you know about your migraine the greater the chances you can interrupt it.

A migraine is more than a headache. It is a complex neurological disease that affects the central nervous system. Headache is one of the symptoms of a hypersensitive and overly excitable brain. Other symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, sound, sensation, ringing in your ears, dizziness, pain on one side of the head that may or may not move to the other side. A migraineur typically gets a warning, called a prodrome, prior to a headache. Prodromes may include an aura such as flashing lights or zig-zag lines before your eyes, strange smells, slurred speech, or an inner knowing that a migraine is coming. The pain may last up to 72 hours.

### The phases of migraine

A migraine typically has four stages: 1) prodrome, 2) aura, 3) pain phase, 4) migraine hangover. Not every migraineur experiences all the stages. The prodrome is the warning phase that a migraine is soon to be upon you. The aura presents the phase where your brain is ready reacting and affecting other parts of your body. The most common auras are visual. They may also include changes in any of your sensations including taste, smell, hearing, numbness, tingling, balance, etc. The pain phase is the most excruciating and some people experience the pain as throbbing and pulsating. I used to experience my scalp being so sensitive and hot that it hurt to touch. Other symptoms during this period include nausea and/or vomiting, aversion to food, intense light sensitivity resulting in the need to withdraw to a dark, quiet, stimulation-free room. The postdrome or migraine hangover varies as well and many people sleep, feeling exhausted, while others may feel refreshed or even euphoric.

### What are your migraine triggers?

Some common triggers include too little sleep or too much sleep, stress, low blood sugar, red wine, hormonal changes for women, weather changes, strong smells such as certain perfumes or flowers, smoke, dehydration, loud sounds, TMJ, bright lights, or other stimuli.

### What are hormonally related migraines?

A migraine may occur in direct relation to the rise and fall of estrogen. Some women have migraines that are triggered by ovulation, others have migraines starting 7 to 14 days before a period or until three days within the menses. Still other women have migraines triggered around peri-menopause.

The treatment of migraines associated with hormones must address both the hormone issues and a hypersensitive brain. Herbs to bring hormones into balance or bio-identical hormones may be needed.

### What can I do to take charge of my migraines?

**Step 1:** Discover as much as you can about the migraine. I recommend that you keep a journal and track the following: prodrome symptoms, auras and type of aura, the specific symptoms that you get when you are in the pain phase. For example note how often you are nauseated, vomit, hypersensitive to light, sound, temperature. Note the severity of pain and how long the pain lasts. Increase your awareness of migraine triggers. What happens after the migraine? Does your migraine have a cyclical nature? For women, is it related to menses?

**Step 2:** Create a foundation of health.

- Reduce stress
- Get 7-8 hours of sleep
- Exercise
- Eat regular meals and include protein in every meal, especially if you have low blood sugar.
- Stay hydrated by drinking 7-8 glasses of water a day.

**Step 3:** Find a practitioner to help you fill out your plan of action.

Each migraine is unique to you and your brain sensitivity. Consequently, treatment is individualized. The following supplements have been useful for many individuals. Magnesium has been found to be deficient in individuals with headaches. Magnesium counteracts vasospasm, relaxes muscles, stabilizes cell membranes and is involved in the synthesis of serotonin. Butterbur has been found to be efficacious in the prevention of migraine headaches. The herb is anti-spasmodic, anti-inflammatory and regulates calcium channels. I have found it to be useful with many patients. Feverfew is an herb that has been useful with migraines, however, it is important to determine if the individual is allergic to ragweed before using it as feverfew is in the Compositae family. Other nutrients useful in the treatment of migraines include riboflavin, vitamin B6 and 5-HTP, which is the precursor to serotonin. There are times when it will be necessary to utilize medications to abort the migraine.

Other treatments found to be useful in



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the treatment of migraines include CES or Cranial Electrotherapy Stimulation. CES involves the application of small amounts of current, 1,000 microamperes, through the head via ear clip electrodes. Several studies have demonstrated that CES is effective for migraines and other types of headaches. Studies show that

CES combined with biofeedback is twice as effective as CES alone. I have found that CES and hypnotherapy is helpful with migraine headaches. Additionally, ETT or Emotional Transformation Therapy and the use of color is effective in reducing both the pain and emotions related to coping with chronic migraines.

You can reduce your migraines by learning as much as you can about your migraines. You can work with your doctor to create a plan to avoid your triggers, maximize health and utilize techniques that are effective for you. Know that you can create balance in your brain and life.

*Moira Fitzpatrick is a naturopathic physician and licensed clinical psychologist who practices in the Northgate area of Seattle. She is a primary care provider, specializes in the unique health concerns of women, practices functional holistic medicine and is an ETT practitioner. Dr. Fitzpatrick can be reached at (206) 525-5576, [www.theemeraldcenter.com](http://www.theemeraldcenter.com).*

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