

# The Wellness Express™

Jump on the train to good health

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## Holistic Methods Can Help with Migraine Headaches

**Presented by:** Adjusted For Life

Migraine headaches are one of the world's most disabling illnesses, with over 325 million migraine sufferers globally.<sup>1</sup> In North America companies lose nearly \$15 billion annually from lost worker productivity due to migraines.<sup>2</sup> About 10% of the population experiences such painful migraines they are unable to perform their job duties. And studies show chronic migraine patients are often unable to hold down full-time work.<sup>2</sup>

As well as headache pain, migraine sufferers endure depression and anxiety at twice the rate of the general population.<sup>3</sup>

### Migraine Basics

A migraine can last for hours or days. It can be an infrequent event, or it can develop into a chronic condition, where sufferers are affected almost daily with pain.

Unlike other headaches, migraines occur in phases. The painful phase of the migraine is almost always associated with other bodily symptoms like nausea, vomiting and enhanced sensitivity to light and sound.

There are four phases involved with migraines: prodrome, aura, headache, and postdrome.<sup>4</sup> Although not all migraines involve all four phases, most patients experience a combination of these symptoms

Migraines are often preceded by a specific phase called the prodrome, and it may occur hours or days before the actual headache. During this phase, sufferers may experience depression, food cravings, neck stiffness, hyperactivity or fatigue.

The next of the four phases is the aura. This is a collection of neurological symptoms that usually involve a person's visual experience (e.g. seeing flashing or wavy lights and patterns). According to medical experts, only about 20% of patients with migraines experience an aura, and it is likely to occur shortly before the onset of the headache.<sup>5</sup>

### What Causes Migraines?

While many aspects of it remain a mystery, a migraine appears to cause vascular changes in the brain that are responsible for the pain. Researchers have noted that certain people experience blood vessel contractions and dilations in the brain just prior to a migraine occurring.

There seems to be several biochemical, lifestyle and nutritional factors that trigger migraines, including:

- Stress
- Lack of sleep
- Changes in weather

### Exercise of the Week

Lumbar flexion – “angry cat”

Difficulty: Easy

*(Consult your chiropractor before engaging in this or any other exercise.)*

**Start:** On hands and knees. Be aware of position of spine – start with a neutral spine or a flat back.

**Exercise:** Engage inner abdominals first by bringing belly button inwards. Then, curl lower back up toward ceiling. Imagine belly button pushing lumbar spine up toward the ceiling. Also tuck chin in toward chest to create full spinal flexion. Hold for 10-15 seconds.



Presented by: Dr. Les Davidson - Adjusted For Life  
2004, 14th Street NW, Suite 100, Calgary AB T2M 3N3  
PH: 403.284.4743



- Chemicals
- Liver problems
- Rapid change in hormone levels
- Specific foods
- Alcohol
- Medical conditions (depression, severe hypertension)
- Medications

If your family has a history of migraines, you have a higher risk of developing these types of headaches.

## Beyond Medication: Other Solutions

The traditional medical treatment for migraines is over-the-counter and prescription drugs. However, medication is not effective for all patients and can cause uncomfortable side effects.

Here are some other ways to prevent or decrease the frequency and intensity of a migraine headache.

### Dietary Changes

Eliminating food triggers and nutritional deficiencies may help some migraine patients. Common culprits for initiating migraines include cheese, chocolate, citrus fruits, coffee, wheat products, nuts, and meat.<sup>6</sup>

Although research results have been mixed, some studies support the theory migraine patients have insufficient magnesium in their bodies and increasing their intake of this mineral may provide relief. Magnesium helps reduce the damage caused by stress, a trigger for migraines.

An early study on magnesium and migraines showed patients who received 600 milligrams of magnesium for 12 weeks encountered a 40 % reduction in migraine frequency.<sup>7</sup>

Another possible treatment is antioxidants. Oxidative stress causes a rise in dangerous free radicals and antioxidants stop these molecules from causing damage.

In research published by *The Journal of Head and Face Pain*, a study on children and adolescents affected by migraines showed low levels of the antioxidant coenzyme Q10 in their bodies. The study participants received daily coenzyme Q10 supplements for the research period. At the end of the study, the participants reported fewer migraines and lower pain intensity.<sup>8</sup> (Consult your chiropractor before using supplements.)

### Behavior Therapy

Psychological counseling shows potential as a therapeutic tool for people with migraines. In this approach, migraine patients are taught several strategies to help cope with their headaches. They learn how to identify possible triggers, recognize early signs of an emerging migraine attack, and practice relaxation techniques and neck stretching exercises.

In one study of behavior therapy and migraines, patients reported a reduction in migraine attacks and felt a greater sense of confidence in controlling their headaches.<sup>9</sup>

### Chiropractic

Many studies show chiropractic as an effective tool to treat migraine headaches.<sup>10</sup> Some chiropractic patients achieve significant migraine relief with just a single adjustment, but most others require several sessions to get the maximum benefit. If you or a loved one suffer from migraine headaches, talk to your chiropractor about treatment options.

## Quote to Inspire

*"Man is a physical and spiritual epitome of the Universe"*

*Daniel D. Palmer*

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Editor & writer: David Coyne  
 Writer: Dr. Christian Guenette, DC  
 Design: Elena Zhukova  
 Graphics: Faith Ruba  
 Photos: Fred Goldstein  
 Production: Mike Talarico

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