

6 CRITICAL AREAS FOR HEADACHES AND MIGRAINES





VERTICAL WALL

HEADACHE + MIGRAINE RELIEF

THE 6 CRITICAL AREAS OF HEADACHES AND MIGRAINES

- **STRESS**
- **SLEEP**
- **DIET**
- **WATER**
- **EXERCISE**
- **NECK**

STRESS

We all experience it. It varies in its intensity depending on the situation. In nature, a gazelle experiences a high level of stress when a lion is on the prowl. Once the lion starts the chase, the gazelle demonstrates an incredible burst of speed that creates distance between it and the lion. Once the gazelle is at a safe distance and the lion is no longer pursuing, the gazelle stops, recovers and is back to the daily routine of eating grass, going on with life as usual. As humans, we experience these high levels of stress that can last a whole day, multiple days, even YEARS!

Here is a quick description of what happens to our bodies when high levels of stress are experienced for long periods of time:

- The adrenal glands release adrenaline (epinephrine) and cortisol which increase your heartbeat and send blood rushing to the areas that need it for the FIGHT or FLIGHT.
- When the fear or stressor is gone, the adrenal glands should tell all systems to go back to normal. If the levels are not returned to normal, or if the stressor doesn't go away, the response to the stress will continue.

PROLONGED STRESS MAY HAVE THESE EFFECTS:

- Impaired cognition
- Decreased thyroid function
- Accumulation of abdominal fat
- Prolonged healing times
- Prolonged release of Adrenaline

IF STRESS IS LEFT UNTREATED you may experience the following:

- **Heart Problems** - Over the long term, people who react more to stress have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease. The characteristics that are at high risk are those that are impatient, hostile, highly competitive, move and talk rapidly. Hostility is marked as the most significant, followed by diet and the stress response of eating comfort foods that generally include salt and fat.
- **Insulin Sensitivity** - Epinephrine impairs tissue sensitivity to insulin. See the blog on migraines and diet for more information regarding this.
- **High Blood Pressure** - Hypertension increases your risk of stroke, heart and kidney failure, as well as heart attack. Blood pressure increases with stress and long-term increase of blood pressure can create a permanent effect.
- **Increased risk of infection** - When under stress the immune system is suppressed, making one more vulnerable to infections. Arthritis and Multiple Sclerosis may be exacerbated by stress, especially if it is chronic stress. Being stressed decreases the rate of recovery from illnesses as well.
- **Infertility** - Stress is not typically correlated with infertility, but the two can go hand in hand. Most couples are able to become pregnant on holiday or while on vacation as stress levels are typically lower. These times also help with the effectiveness of infertility treatments.

- **Pain** - Neck, low back and muscle pain is present with prolonged stress. The pain can be widespread. **It is known that migraine sufferers are highly affected by stress and their symptoms correlate with the amount of stress they have in their lives.**

So, how does stress relate specifically to headaches and migraines?

A RESEARCH ARTICLE FOUND:

- Two consecutive days of either high stress or low sleep were strongly predictive of headache, whereas two days of low stress or adequate sleep were protective. Increased headache risk was present only when the earlier day was characterized by high stress. Upwards of 80% of migraine patients identify stress as a headache precipitant.
- Each individual responded to stress differently and determined the intensity of the headache or migraine.
- The day before and the current day level of stress correlates with the headache or migraine intensity.
- The day after a high stress day is predictable for a letdown headache also known as the “Saturday” headache.

We all have control over how much stress we allow into our lives and how we respond to it.

THIS IS VERY EMPOWERING AND MAY BE THE BIGGEST LIFESTYLE CHANGE THAT YOU CAN MAKE TO DECREASE THE IMPACT THAT HEADACHES AND MIGRAINES HAVE ON YOUR LIFE!

SLEEP

Sleep is a precious commodity that our body relies heavily on to be able to function and repair. A sound night of rest allows our body to heal, grow, digest, recover, retain memory and decrease stress. Hindered sleep also increases the body's resistance to insulin. A lack of sleep combined with high levels of stress is almost guaranteed to trigger a headache or migraine.

Lack of sleep has shown to be a trigger for migraines and tension headaches, 61% and 49% on average, respectively.

RESEARCH HAS ALSO SHOWN THAT THE FOLLOWING SCENARIOS CAN “PREDICT” HIGH HEADACHE OR MIGRAINE ACTIVITY:

- 2 consecutive nights of less than 4 hours of sleep
- 1 night of less than 4 hours and the next night of 8 hours

With 2 consecutive nights of sound sleep (approximately 8 hours), the headache and migraine activity is lessened and predicted to be low.

FOUR WAYS TO OBTAIN BETTER SLEEP:

- **Wind down and clear your head:** Create a low stimulus environment at least one hour before going to bed. This means putting the phone or ipad down (all blue lights increase alertness) and out of the bedroom. Turn off the television and all lights that are bright. Lighting candles and creating a low light ambiance can be extremely restorative. Essential oils can also play a role in sleep. When used before bed, studies have shown that lavender oil can not only help you fall asleep but also improve the overall quality of rest.

- **Exercise during the day:** Exercising at night tricks your body into waking up (this is the case for most people). If a workout at night is the only time that works, then try and limit your movement to “moderate” in intensity. Follow up with meditative breathing to slow down your heart rate which relaxes and has a calming effect.
- **Avoid alcohol and big meals close to bed time:** Set an eating window which condenses your food intake. Meals prior to bed is a guarantee for sleep disturbance. Heartburn and indigestion can lead to a long and uncomfortable evening.
- **Create a sleep schedule:** Have a consistent bed time for yourself. Set a timer for bedtime if that reminds you to get ready for bed. Journal your sleep times and how you are feeling. Make notes of any patterns you start seeing and problematic areas.

The main conclusion: Less sleep is associated with more severe headaches and migraines, so it is critical to discover ways to create better sleep.

DIET

Along with controlling our stress levels and the amount of quality sleep we get, we also have the ability to control our diet. Diet changes will not necessarily eliminate headaches and migraines but will do a considerable job decreasing the intensity of the attacks.

In the migraine process, research has shown that there is an overall increase in the sensitivity of pain pathways. This also includes:

- Increase of inflammation that is present in our bodies
- Increase in the frequency of Gastrointestinal (GI) disorders

The chronic inflammatory response starts in the GI tract with the inflammation of vasoactive mediators.

What is in our GI tract that drives this process?

Helicobacter Pylori is guilty of causing ulcers (hence inflammation) and creating bad flora in our gut. It is the one bacteria that is common to those with migraines.

The good news?

Eradication of harmful bacterium in our GI tract has shown to significantly decrease the intensity of MIGRAINE attacks.

The GREAT news!

The flora in the gastrointestinal tract can be altered in just a week.

Insulin resistance and G.I. is a considerable factor in the inflammation process. This makes it more difficult for the body to transfer glucose into the areas where it may be used for energy. Added inflammation in the body causes an increase in the resistance of skeletal muscle (i.e. in our arms and legs) to insulin.

Some signs of increased Insulin resistance include:

- Increased waist to hip ratio
- Sugar cravings
- Fatigue, especially after eating
- Need for water and the sense of dehydration

Blood tests reveal these findings when Insulin Tissue Resistance increases:

- Increased fasting glucose
- Increased triglyceride levels
- Increased LDL levels
- Decreased HDL levels
- Increased blood pressure
- Increased CGRP levels

The focus needs to be a **Low Glycemic and High Nutrient Diet**. Here are some tips for proven dietary changes that will decrease inflammation, decrease the sensitivity of pain pathways and ultimately **reduce the intensity of HEADACHE and MIGRAINE attacks**:

- Increase your fiber
- Limit your protein
- Decrease your grains
- Decrease your intake of foods with a high glycemic Index
- Stay away from saturated and trans fatty acids
- Eliminate IgG positive foods
- Eat plant-based foods (less processed)
- Introduce curcumin into your cooking
- Start taking omega 3 fatty acids
- Start taking magnesium

WATER

Water and the amount we should be drinking is a common topic of interest, especially in the hot summer months and dry climates.

“How much should I drink?”

“I drink coffee/tea/juice... doesn't that count?”

“Is it really that important to stay properly hydrated?”

“Will drinking water help my headaches and migraines?”

The researched answer to the last question is “YES!”

The brainstem of headache and migraine sufferers is already sensitized and primed for an attack, and dehydration is a trigger that is very common. Research has shown the risk of a migraine increases 8% for every nine degree increase in temperature, which correlates with the body's increased need for fluids to replenish what is being depleted. Staying hydrated has shown to decrease the duration and frequency of attacks.

So, how much should you be drinking? A good rule of thumb is to consume half your body weight in oz. Add eight ounces more for every 15-20 minutes of exercise, keeping in mind the temperature of the environment to account for increased sweating. Higher altitudes will require even more fluids and athletes require two-thirds of their body weight (in ounces) in water daily.

Always having a bottle of water or two handy will help you stay hydrated. A good practice is to have one in your home and one in your vehicle so that water is always available.

So, bottoms up to staying hydrated!

EXERCISE

Let's be honest, when suffering from a headache or migraine, **exercise is probably the last thing on your mind**. Even after a migraine or headache, exercise most likely doesn't sound like a desirable activity. Exercise may even trigger a migraine, but is it really the cause??

Research suggests that there is a correlation between the two, but it's the type of exercise performed that matters. **Moderate AEROBIC** exercise has shown to produce a natural opioid effect in the human body when pain is present and may also act as a prophylactic. When the brainstem is "sensitized", it is able to be desensitized with the natural opioid effects of exercise. Medications prescribed for migraines (those in the Triptan family) provide a similar effect by **desensitizing the brainstem**. If given the choice, wouldn't you prefer some moderate exercise? Unlike medications, the side effects of exercise are non-existent and it has shown to decrease depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and increase self-confidence!

Research demonstrates that those who are physically active are able to decrease the frequency and duration of their attacks. So, what types of exercises are considered **aerobic**? Here are a few examples:

- Walking (brisk pace)
- Jogging (for those that run at a medium pace for a prolonged period of time)
- Biking (low resistance)
- Low- to Medium-impact Yoga

NECK

Imagine a way to treat headaches and migraines of all types without medications, injections, surgeries and multiple medical office visits. Imagine a treatment approach that can rule your neck in or out as a cause of your symptoms. This can be determined within your first visit.

New research has shown that headaches and migraines of all types may be the result of a **sensitized brainstem**. Medications that are typically prescribed work to desensitize the brainstem. The ongoing challenge is that the relief is temporary and the side effects may be detrimental long term. Also, the medications, surgeries and injections are expensive with no definite end in sight.

Research has also shown that the top 3 vertebrae in the neck have nerves that influence the brainstem pathway. Addressing the upper neck through the **Watson Headache Approach** has been clinically shown to desensitize the lower brainstem. This approach has shown to significantly decrease the frequency, duration and/or intensity, as well as decreased need for medications, injections and surgeries. Most patients notice a change within a few visits and continue to experience relief as they progress through treatment.

Don't suffer another moment!

Contact Vertical Wall Physical Therapy today for your free 15 minute phone consultation to determine, based on your history and presentation, if you are a candidate.

Get relief today

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