

## An alternative approach to treating migraine

By Joy Healey

*SUMMARY: It's an unfortunate fact that only a third of migraine sufferers are fully satisfied with conventional management. Many people are looking for drug-free solutions, but very few are aware of the wide range of treatments presented by nutritional therapy.*

If you, or someone you love, is a migraine sufferer, you'll know the devastating effect this agonising affliction can have on the whole family - not just the sufferer. Perhaps you've tried most of the conventional ways to banish migraine from your life. Unfortunately only a third of sufferers are fully satisfied with conventional management. The side-effects of certain drugs can be as worrying as the problems they aim to treat. Many people are looking for drug-free solutions, and nutritional therapy has much to offer.

To treat migraine, identify the problem and eliminate it – but that is often easier said than done. Being a one-time sufferer myself, I made migraine the focus of my 3-year nutrition consultancy training course. Obviously there are too many possible causes to describe in detail in a short article such as this, but here's a brief over-view of the factors a nutritional approach to migraine will consider.

Approaches that other complementary therapists may take are covered in my ebook.

There is little doubt that **food intolerance** is a major cause of migraine and many studies have demonstrated that detecting and removing the offending food(s) can improve or even eliminate symptoms in many sufferers. A study in the Lancet found that 93% of sufferers found an improvement on eliminating allergenic foods from their diet. But often it's not the 'usual suspects' that cause the problems. There are several ways to do the necessary detective work. For a free article on food intolerance testing, visit the website below.

But food intolerance isn't at the bottom of all migraines. Other **dietary adjustments** can make a world of difference to reducing migraines - AND improving your general health and well-being. Improving your diet means far more than just eating '5-a-day', important though that is! For instance, it's vital to maintain a steady blood sugar level, eat regular, light meals that include protein but are low in simple carbohydrates (such as sugary and refined foods). Eat extra amounts of almonds, fennel, watercress, and fresh pineapple. Reduce salt intake and avoid acid forming foods (meat, dairy, cereals, grain and bread). Avoid fried and fatty foods.

**Acid / alkaline imbalance** in your diet can cause problems - put simply, acid-forming foods are protein based, while alkaline-forming foods are plant based.

**Nutrient deficiencies** can be problematical - there's a whole host of research into the role of different B vitamins and **minerals** such as magnesium in migraine prevention. For instance, calcium and magnesium in the correct balance help regulate muscle tone and nerve transmissions. As the brain is largely composed of fatty material, you'll need to be sure that your diet contains plenty of **essential fats** - while minimising intake of 'bad' fats.

A less well-known nutrient has also been found effective in helping migraine sufferers. **CoQ10** is a naturally occurring substance similar in structure to vitamin K. It is not a vitamin because, subject to the availability of all necessary nutrients, it can be made in the body; but as so often occurs, production declines with age! Its main functions are in energy production and as an antioxidant. In migraine it's thought to help by improving blood circulation to the brain. Research by Dr Rozen at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation published in the International Headache Society's journal (March 2002) found that after three months taking CoQ10, 61% of patients had a greater than 50% reduction in the number of days with migraine - a significant reduction. The fact that patients in the study had no problems using it, together with other beneficial effects of the nutrient, makes CoQ10 a very appealing agent for migraine prevention. Natural sources of CoQ10 include beef, chicken, ham, pork, salmon, sardines, mackerel, egg, spinach, sesame seeds and walnuts; but no food can provide anything close to the dose used in the trial so supplementation would be necessary.

When considering circulation of blood and oxygen to the brain ginkgo or vitamin B<sub>3</sub> are also useful nutrients to look at. If taking supplements try to use hypo-allergenic and chelated forms. Exercise and deep breathing will also improve blood circulation.

But even if your diet is top-notch, unless you're correctly **digesting and absorbing** your food, you won't benefit from the nutrients it contains. 'Leaky gut' is a subject that links to food intolerances, mentioned earlier. You may not expect to need **hydrochloric acid** in your body, but it's essential for protein digestion! Check and supplement where appropriate.

Many sufferers notice that **stress** or strong emotions trigger their migraines. What is less well-known is that there are dietary changes you can make that can lessen the impact, even when you can't do anything about your hectic life-style. For instance, vitamin B5 is important in a nutritional approach to stress management and vitamin C aids anti-stress hormone production

Other **non-food triggers** include lack of exercise, excess or lack of sleep, liver malfunction, weather changes, caffeine withdrawal, certain drugs, dental problems, flashing or glaring lights or exposure to cigarette smoke. Physiotherapy may also be helpful in certain cases.

Could **toxic metals** be slowly poisoning you? A Hair Mineral Analysis is a simple and cost-effective way to assess your levels of lead, aluminium, mercury and cadmium - as well as checking that you have adequate levels of such essential nutrients as magnesium, chromium, zinc - and just as importantly, that the balance between minerals is correct. Read more about Hair Mineral Analysis on the website below.

Less dramatically, could simple **constipation** be causing a problem? If your bowel functions are poor, waste material cannot be eliminated and circulates for too long within your system. It's vital to maintain a good balance between the '**good**' and '**bad**' bacteria in your intestine.

**Hormonal health** is important too, especially for women. The Pill may cause B<sub>6</sub> deficiency resulting in migraines; some migraines result from oestrogen fluctuations - these often decrease after the menopause. Foods containing phyto-oestrogens (citrus fruits, apples, cherries, plums, oats, rice, wheat, carrots, potatoes, parsley and fennel) can have a hormone-balancing effect. Consideration of hormonal health leads onto looking at **liver health**. Good liver function is necessary to remove spent hormones.

**Homocysteine** also has a profound effect on blood vessels and in research, compared to controls, migraine sufferers were twice as likely to have a tendency to over-produce homocysteine. The migraine link has yet to be proven, but as there's overwhelming research showing that high homocysteine is linked to strokes and heart-attacks, and as it can be simply and effectively lowered by nutritional means, it makes sense to maintain low levels.

Many sufferers are not aware that misuse of **over-the-counter painkillers** may increase headaches, especially those that contain caffeine. If any prescribed medications contain caffeine, discuss changing them with your GP. **Do not** stop or change any prescribed medicine without contacting your GP.

This brief article has only been able to provide a taster of the factors that could be contributing to migraines. More information on migraine, hair mineral analysis and food intolerance testing is available from the websites below.

Keep up-to-date with new information on migraine at my blog:  
<http://natural-migraine-alternatives.blogspot.com/>

For immediate delivery of an ebook full of further recommendations for natural, alternatives approaches to treat and prevent migraine visit: <http://www.natural-migraine-alternatives.com>