

Information for Patients

Headache Hygiene - What is it?

Headache hygiene is the practice of taking care of yourself in a way that will reduce the likelihood, frequency, intensity, and severity of headaches. One surely wonders if this is possible? Indeed it is! Many lifestyle factors influence migraine and other headache conditions. Therefore, taking care of these lifestyle factors may help reduce the risk of severe attacks. These include two simple steps:

1. Lifestyle changes
2. Trigger avoidance

1. Lifestyle Changes

Migraine is not a predictable disorder for all people. Simple things like changes to a normal routine can lead to a severely disabling migraine attack. Understanding how lifestyle affects the severity and frequency of attacks can be a large part of successful migraine prevention.

It is unrealistic to expect anyone to completely change a certain life style. However, certain things are relatively easy to do. For example:

1. Maintain regular sleep patterns. Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day.
2. Exercise regularly. For example, aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes three times a week will help reduce frequency or severity of migraine.
3. Eat regular meals, do not skip meals, and eat a good, healthy breakfast.
4. Reduce stress. Limit stress by avoiding conflicts and resolving disputes calmly. Some people find it helpful to take a daily "stress break."
5. Avoiding known triggers (see table on Common Triggers)

Establishing daily routines that help reduce migraine attacks is important for long-term migraine prevention. For example:

1. Schedule a relaxation period that includes relaxation strategies such as:
 - o Take slow, deep breaths
 - o Focus the mind on a relaxing image or scene
 - o Try soft relaxing lighting and sounds
2. Exercise on a regular basis, even if your daily routine changes (such as when traveling, when you have house guests, or when your workload increases).
3. Maintain the medication treatment plan designed by you and your physician. Early intervention may help prevent the migraine from progressing into a severe, disabling attack.

2. Trigger avoidance

Triggers are specific factors that may increase your risk of having a migraine attack. The migraine sufferer has inherited a sensitive nervous system that under certain circumstances, can lead to migraine. Triggers do not "cause" migraine. Instead, they are thought to activate processes that cause migraine in people who are prone to the condition. A certain trigger will not induce a migraine in every person; and, in a single migraine sufferer, a trigger may not cause a migraine every time. By keeping a headache diary, you will be able to identify some triggers for your particular headaches. Once you have identified triggers, it will be easier for you to avoid them and reduce your chances of having a migraine attack.

Common Triggers

Categories	Triggers	Examples
Dietary	Skiping meals/fasting Food Items	Aged cheese Alcohol/red wine Chemicals [eg. MSG (monosodium glutamate)] Caffeine withdrawal Processed meats (containing nitrates)
	Medications	Nitroglycerine
Chronobiology	Change in sleep patterns	Napping Oversleeping Too little sleep
Environmental	Weather changes	Extreme heat or cold
	Bright lights Odors/pollution	Sun without eye shades Smog, perfumes, chemicals Flashing lights or screens
Hormonal	Estrogen level changes (rapid fluctuations in estrogen levels)	Menstruation Hormone replacement therapies Birth control pills Menopause
Stress	Work	Unrealistic timeliness
	Home	Financial issues
	Family	Job changes / moving Childbirth / marriage Death/loss
Stress Letdown	Discontinuation of work	Weekends / vacations Ending a project or stressful task (such as a presentation)
Physical	Injuries	Head trauma
	Over-exertion	Exercising when out of shape or in heat

