

The Link Between Diet and Migraine Headaches

Are migraines caused by what a person eats?

Diet affects the frequency and severity of headaches in some people, and people with migraines are often sensitive to different foods. Dietary restrictions are not formally accepted as a treatment for migraines.

How do I know if my diet is related to my migraines?

The first step is to start keeping a food diary. Track every food and beverage that you consume, and track your physical symptoms as well. It's also important to note the times that you eat. After a month, look for patterns. If you believe that you've discovered a pattern between your diet and physical wellness, try eliminating the food from your diet for a month and see if you have a reduction in symptoms.

Why do some foods seem to cause migraines?

Here are a few hypotheses:

- Foods affect the release of certain brain chemicals, which could lead to migraines.
- Different types of food cause different amounts of blood vessel constriction or dilation, which could lead to headaches.
- Certain foods directly stimulate specific areas of the brain, leading to migraines.

What types of foods seem to lead to migraines?

It seems that some amino acids, the building blocks of protein, are correlated to migraine frequency. However, studies are inconclusive.

What specific foods are likely to trigger migraines?

Dairy

- Ripened cheeses, such as cheddar and Swiss, and blue cheese
- Processed cheese products
- Yogurt
- Buttermilk
- Sour cream
- Ice cream

Meat, Poultry, and Fish

- Smoked, cured, or pickled meat and fish, such as herring
- Processed meat, such as hot dogs or bologna
- Chicken liver

- Fermented soy products, such as miso, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, tofu, and tempeh

Vegetables

- Avocado
- Eggplant
- Tomatoes
- Spinach
- Olives
- String beans

Fruits

- Figs
- Raisins
- Papaya
- Pineapple
- Strawberries
- Citrus Fruit
- Bananas
- Passion Fruit
- Red Plums
- Berry pie filling and canned berries

Nuts and Legumes

- All nuts and nut butter, including peanut butter
- Lima beans
- Navy beans
- Pinto beans
- Garbanzo beans
- Pole beans
- Fava beans
- Navy beans

Miscellaneous

- Chocolate
- Vinegar
- Condiments, such as mustard, mayonnaise, and ketchup
- Sauerkraut
- MSG (monosodium glutamate), often found in Chinese food and processed foods
- Yeast
- Caffeine
- Alcohol
- Aspartame
- Foods with a high-fat content

Should a person who suffers from migraines consider any other dietary changes?

Omega-3 fatty acids may help to prevent migraine headaches. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fish such as salmon and tuna. Ginger, if taken at the first hint of an approaching episode, also may help to prevent a migraine from surfacing because of its antihistamine and anti-inflammatory properties. Multivitamins are suggested because some studies show that the B vitamins and antioxidants lessen the frequency of migraines.

Women have shown some benefit from taking daily calcium and vitamin D supplements. Because low blood sugar is likely to cause migraine headaches, it is important to eat every 3-4 hours, focusing on fresh foods and avoiding processed foods as much as possible. Different food manufacturers use different ingredients in the same food products, explaining why one brand of chocolate may lead to a migraine, while another will not.

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