



IDEAL NEUROLOGY
CLINIC

RENATA CHALFIN, M.D.

7280 W. Palmetto Park Road, Suite 104, Boca Raton, FL 33433

Mailing: PO Box 880761, Boca Raton, FL 33488

www.idealneurology.com | rchalfin@idealneurology.com

(ph) 561-961-8575 | (f) 561-898-1710

Lifestyle Management of Headaches

Multiple factors play a role in primary headache disorders such as migraines. Both genetics (like having other members of your family with headaches) and environment can contribute. Of course, you can only control the things in your power. The following are some things that you can try to optimize in your life to reduce the risk of chronic headaches. As always, talk to your doctor before making any drastic changes.

- 1. Medication overuse** – this is one of the most common diagnoses added on to primary headache disorders. The use of *any* pain medication (whether over the counter, prescribed, opioid, triptan, or anything for pain) more than twice per week can lead to an increase in frequency or severity of headaches. If you are taking daily pain medication, even if not for headaches, try to start limiting this to no more than twice per week.
- 2. Caffeine** – you may have heard of “caffeine withdrawal” headaches; did you know that caffeine itself can cause headaches? People who have migraines can be especially sensitive. If you are suffering from frequent or bothersome headaches, it is a good idea to start to keep track of the relationship of your headaches to your caffeine intake, and even to try to wean yourself off all caffeine sources (including coffee, tea, soda, dark chocolate, etc.) for at least two months.
- 3. Hydration** – one of the first things we do for a person who comes to the ER with intractable headache is to hydrate them with 1-2L of fluid. You should be drinking eight glasses of water per day. That's 64 ounces, about 2 liters, or a half gallon. Start replacing soda, juice, coffee, or tea with water. Drink an extra cup for any caffeine you take. Keep a jug with you at all times. Drink more when you are exercising, have a fever, or are sick.
- 4. Sleep** – try to get a solid 7-8 hours of sleep per night if possible. Go to sleep at the same time each night and try to wake up at the same time each morning (even on weekends). Get rid of screens and other devices from the bedroom. If you have problems sleeping, speak to your doctor. There are lots of methods to help.
- 5. Exercise** – aside from improving your own fitness level, regular exercise can also reduce headache frequency and severity. It is recommended to have at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise per week, as well as some resistance training. Bonus: exercise has been shown to reduce the risk of stroke, heart attack, dementia, Parkinson's disease, and diabetes!
- 6. Avoidance of triggers** – if you haven't started already, start keeping a headache diary, noting the days you have your headaches and anything you ate, drank, or did that day, including any medications taken. Some people can have their migraines provoked by MSG (e.g., found in many packaged or Asian foods), cheese, wine or other alcohol, chocolate, processed meats, or other foods. Some people have their migraines provoked by skipping meals, by getting less sleep than usual, by bright lights, by smoke, noise, strong odors, or by stress. Once you identify them, try to avoid these triggers to the best of your ability. One way to avoid food triggers is to eat healthy, home-cooked meals, so you know the ingredients!
- 7. Relaxation** – some people just have headaches. Others *suffer* from headaches. Relaxation is easier said than done, but if you have depression, anxiety, or just irritability, this can exacerbate your headaches and leave you suffering. Make a list of things that help you relax (e.g., exercise, coloring, watching a funny show), and find 20 minutes per day for them. Learn about breathing exercises and mindfulness meditation. This website has great guided relaxation exercises: <http://www.dawnbuse.com/relaxation> If you are still suffering, find a therapist or speak to your doctor about starting a medication.

You may do all of the above and still suffer from migraines. It's not your fault. We have lots of options!