

Not Tonight, I Have a Headache...

Part Three: The Migraine



By: Jenny Crosby, DC
Crosby Chiropractic &
Acupuncture Centre

A severe, recurring headache - a migraine - usually affects only one side of the head and is often characterized by sharp pain. This type of headache is often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and visual disturbances. Women are more likely than men to have migraine headaches.

When migraines occur three or more times a month, preventive treatments involving drug therapy, biofeedback, stress reduction, and elimination of certain foods from the diet are most commonly recommended. Regular exercise, such as swimming or vigorous walking, may also reduce the frequency and severity of migraine headaches.

Drugs that are used to prevent migraine include: sumatriptan (Imitrex), methysergide maleate (Sansert), which counteracts blood vessel constriction; propranolol hydrochloride (Inderal), which also reduces the frequency and severity of migraine headaches; ergotamine tartrate, a vasoconstrictor that helps counteract the painful dilation stage of the headache; amitriptyline, an antidepressant; valproic acid (Depakote), an anticonvulsant; and verapamil (Isoptin, Verelan, Verelan PM, Calan, Bosoptin, Covera-HS), a calcium channel blocker. These drugs all assist with the pain in the moment, but produce side effects and do not reduce the severity or frequency of the migraines experienced by the sufferer.

The National Headache Foundation states that as many as 28 million Americans suffer from migraine headaches annually. Migraines can be caused by a variety of physical and environmental factors, including diet, stress, allergens, menstruation, and changes in the weather.

Migraines can last from several minutes to several days and may leave the person completely incapacitated, making it one of the leading causes of time missed from work. It's estimated that migraines cause more than 157 million lost work days per year, leading to 50 billion dollars per year lost due to medical expenses and absenteeism related to migraines. Almost 4 billion dollars per year is spent just on pain medications for migraines and other headaches. These medications are often ineffective, and while palliative, they're unable to resolve the headaches.

Published in the Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine, in one of the largest studies of its kind, the effectiveness of acupuncture versus medication in treating migraines was evaluated in 120 patients. The study revealed that the patients who received acupuncture experienced fewer migraines, missed fewer days from work and suffered no side effects compared to the patients who were on conventional drug treatments. Acupuncture was found to be both safe and cost effective. Acupuncture was applied to five points known as Stomach 8, Gall Bladder 5, Gall Bladder 20, GV14 and LU7. These points were compared to a drug therapy group who received flunarizine, nimodipine, dihydroergotamine, lisuride, sumatriptan, amitriptyline and longastatina, along with electrical stimulation therapy.

Acupuncture was found to improve the symptoms of migraine with respect to both frequency and severity "more significantly than any type of



"Migraines can be caused by a variety of physical and environmental factors, including diet, stress, allergens, menstruation, and changes in the weather."

medication employed in the study". An interesting side note to this study was that all patients were asked to document any side effects of treatment. None were reported by the acupuncture group, leading to the authors' conclusion that **"the total absence of side effects after acupuncture treatment can be affirmed."** With the subject group that was medicated, 47 of 60 patients had side effects ranging from nausea and diarrhea to gas and burning sensations, those on the flunarizine also had weight gain issues and those

taking sumatriptan also noted difficulty breathing, nausea, chest stuffiness and occasional vomiting.

In another study published in the British Medical Journal, 401 adults with a history of having mostly migraine headaches (at least two a month) were involved in a study in which one group received acupuncture and the other group received conventional medical care. One year later, researchers found those who received acupuncture had 22 fewer days with headaches, used 15 percent less medication, made 25 percent less visits to their doctor and took 15 percent less sick days than the control group.

While not all headaches require medical attention, there are some types of headaches that are signals of more serious issues requiring prompt medical attention. These symptoms include: sudden and/or severe headache; sudden headache associated with a severely stiff neck; headaches associated with fever or convulsions; headaches that are accompanied by confusion or loss of consciousness; headaches that start following a trauma such as an impact to the head; headaches associated with pain in the eye or ear or a persistent headache in a person who was previously headache free.

At Crosby Chiropractic and Acupuncture Centre, our doctors are able to identify both the type of headache a patient is experiencing and the safest, most appropriate treatment for it.

Crosby Chiropractic & Acupuncture Centre

331 Jungermann Rd. St Peters, MO 63376
(636)928-5588
www.crosbychiropractic.com