

TREATING MIGRAINES

Staying Healthy with Dr. Aieta, N.D.

Dear Dr. Aieta,
I am writing you regarding my wife. She is 36 years old and has suffered from migraine headaches since she was in her teens. She has been to numerous specialists and they have placed her on a variety of different medications. But those medications make her feel out of it and half the time they don't even work. She can sometimes get up to three migraines in a week, and they get so severe that she must go to the emergency room for pain medication.

Are there any natural treatments available for migraines?

Steve M.

The conventional approach to preventing and treating migraines leaves a lot to be desired, in terms of both safety and effectiveness. Fortunately, a number of safe and effective treatments exist within the realm of natural medicine.

For some patients, taking measures to control fluctuations in their blood-sugar level is all that is needed to eliminate migraines. Patients with headaches that are caused by drops in blood sugar, or "reactional hypoglycemia," usually improve when they remove all the refined sugar, caffeine and alcohol from their diet. In addition, those folks should eat more frequently and have protein at each meal. I have had numerous cases in which migraines will disappear within a few weeks if patients totally eliminate refined carbohydrates and caffeine from their diet.

Another major contributor to migraine headaches is artificial sweeteners, such as aspartame or Splenda. I've had a patient come to see me who was getting weekly migraines, and after questioning him about his diet, we uncovered that at each meal he was consuming either a food or beverage with aspartame or Splenda in it. Once he eliminated these sweeteners from his diet, his migraines quickly went away.

In my practice, I find that food allergy is an even more common migraine trigger than hypoglycemia. I will usually do an elimination diet with patients, then slowly add foods back into the diet and see which ones may spark off a migraine. In the past, I have noticed that the foods that most frequently cause symptoms when they were added back into the diet were wheat, corn, milk, eggs, chocolate, mushrooms, oranges, coffee and cane sugar.

Other foods to avoid are those containing tyramine (a chemical found in chocolate, citrus fruits, some wines, and aged cheeses), but most medical doctors will warn migraine patients of these foods.

Since we are talking about a female in the case of your wife, Steve, I would also look at hormonal imbalances as a possible cause. Often I will balance hormones through the use of natural plant-based hormones after first running extensive blood work.

Finally, certain nutrient deficiencies can lead to chronic migraines. I've found that a magnesium deficiency can be a major contributor. There are many studies show-



ing the benefits of magnesium in not only preventing migraines, but also helping during an active attack. Another nutrient that I have used with success in preventing migraines is the B-vitamin riboflavin.

Overall, one of the best treatments that I have found for chronic migraines is acupuncture. I have found it to be very beneficial as a preventative treatment in a majority of the patients that have tried it. Some patients require weekly treatments, whereas others can go months in between treatments and remain migraine-free.

So, if any of the readers out there suffer from migraines or know someone who does, there are many safe and effective alternative treatments for this common and often debilitating condition.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board-certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

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