

Migraines & Diet



Migraine is a chronic neurologic disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of severe, throbbing headaches that can last from a few hours to several days. They are often accompanied by symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light and sound. Migraines affect millions of people worldwide and can significantly impact daily life.

Diet and Migraines: How Are They Connected?

Research suggests that diet plays a key role in triggering or preventing migraines. Certain foods can trigger migraines, while others may help reduce their frequency and severity. Identifying and adopting a migraine-friendly diet may be a powerful tool in managing this condition.

Pain-Safe Foods for Migraine Sufferers

For those who experience migraines, choosing pain-safe foods—those that virtually never contribute to headaches—can be an essential part of managing the condition. These include:

- Rice
- Cooked green vegetables (spinach, broccoli)
- Cooked orange vegetables (carrots, sweet potatoes)
- Cooked yellow vegetables (squash)
- Cooked or dried non-citrus fruits (pears, peaches)

Common Migraine Triggers in Diet

Certain foods and additives are notorious for triggering migraines in susceptible individuals. These common migraine triggers, often referred to as the "Dirty Dozen," include:

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| 1. Dairy | 5. Meat | 9. Onions |
| 2. Chocolate | 6. Wheat | 10. Corn |
| 3. Eggs | 7. Nuts and peanuts | 11. Apples |
| 4. Citrus fruits | 8. Tomatoes | 12. Bananas |

Additionally, certain beverages and food additives are well-known culprits. These include:

- **Alcoholic beverages**, particularly red wine
- **Caffeinated drinks** (coffee, tea, cola)
- **Monosodium glutamate (MSG)**, a common flavor enhancer in processed foods
- **Aspartame (NutraSweet)**, an artificial sweetener
- **Nitrites**, found in processed meats like hot dogs and sausages

Identifying and avoiding these common triggers is a crucial step in managing migraines through diet.

Dietary Interventions for Migraine Management

1. Low-Fat, Whole Food, Plant-Based Diet

A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes may help reduce the frequency and intensity of migraines. This approach focuses on foods that are minimally processed and free from common triggers such as preservatives and additives.

2. Elimination Diet

An elimination diet involves removing potential migraine-triggering foods—such as dairy, wheat, and processed foods—from the diet. **A great first step is to eliminate dairy for a few weeks.** Dairy products, including milk, cheese, and yogurt, are common migraine triggers for many people. By removing dairy from your diet, you can observe whether it has any impact on your symptoms. Once you've addressed dairy, you can then focus on other potential food triggers. By systematically reintroducing foods one at a time, individuals can identify specific triggers that contribute to their migraines.

Nutritional Considerations for Migraine Management

1. Magnesium

Low magnesium levels have been linked to migraines. Increasing magnesium-rich foods, such as leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and whole grains, may help reduce migraine frequency.

2. Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Found in flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, and algae-based supplements, omega-3s are known for their anti-inflammatory properties. Consuming more omega-3-rich foods while reducing omega-6 fatty acids (found in processed oils) may support migraine management.

3. Hydration

Dehydration is a common trigger for migraines. Drinking adequate water throughout the day is essential for migraine prevention.

Other Lifestyle Factors Contributing to Migraines

While diet plays a significant role in migraine management, other lifestyle factors can also trigger migraines, including:

- Lack of sleep
- Dehydration
- Stress
- Exposure to chemicals such as perfumes and fragrances
- Alcohol consumption
- Environmental factors like changes in weather
- Certain medications
- Hormonal changes
- Skipping meals

Working with Your Healthcare Provider

It's important to work closely with your healthcare provider to identify your individual migraine triggers and create a tailored management plan. Together, you can determine which foods to avoid and which strategies—such as dietary changes, hydration, and stress management—can help reduce migraine pain.

References

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