

Health for the Whole Family
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MANAGING MIGRAINES

Over 30 million people suffer from migraine headaches in the United States. For many, migraines markedly decrease their mental, physical and social health, and lessen their overall quality of life. As a result, migraines are the most common type of headache for which patients seek treatment. Though a chronic, often inherited condition, migraines can be treated, managed, and ultimately prevented, with the proper guidance from a physician.

Typical characteristics of a migraine headache include moderate or severe pain in the head significant enough to cause disability, nausea, vomiting, increased sensitivity to light and sound, and increased pain with physical exertion. Migraine headaches typically begin in a person's teens or twenties, with peak prevalence occurring at around 40 years of age. One quarter of adults with migraine headaches will experience four or more severe attacks per month, each with a mean duration of about 24 hours.

Migraines are most often inherited genetically. Many researchers are taking a closer look at the changes in the brain and how it functions differently than those who do not have migraines. One theory is that migraines result from the increased sensitivity of the nervous system which may then be more reactive to changes in either your body or the environment. Researchers believe that changes in the brain activity or environment cause the nervous system to respond. This leads to a cascade of events culminating with inflamed, painful blood vessels and sustained transmission of pain impulses in the brain, even after the stimulus resolves, which result in a migraine.”

Environmental factors that can trigger migraines include specific noise pitches, lighting situations, weather, and high altitudes. In addition, flare-ups can be instigated by physical factors and eating habits. These include too much sleep or too little sleep; stress; dehydration; certain foods such as aged cheeses, soy sauce, and older left-over foods, as well as those that contain food additives such as monosodium glutamate (MSG) and aspartame.

Although a cure for migraines has yet to be found, those suffering from this condition do not have to live with the pain. An effective way to overcome these chronic headaches is to learn how to manage them. Migraine management can consist of proper medication as well as changing your lifestyle. There are many migraine drugs available, so it is important that you find one that is best for you.

It is also suggested that patients with migraine headaches look into Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT). OMT is a treatment used by osteopathic physicians (D.O.s), in which D.O.s use their hands to help diagnose and treat injury and illness and encourage the body's natural tendency toward good health. With OMT, D.O.s can lessen the pain and discomfort of migraine headaches for patients; sometimes in place of medication and, other times, in conjunction with it.

Adjusting your lifestyle to avoid personal migraine triggers, as determined by you and your physician, is another key to decreasing the likelihood of attacks.

Even though migraine headaches can be incapacitating at times, they should not stop you from living your life comfortably. With the proper knowledge about migraines and a physician's care, the frequency and severity of migraine attacks may decrease dramatically.

Preventive medicine is just one aspect of care osteopathic physicians (D.O.s) provide. D.O.s are fully-licensed to prescribe medicine and practice in all specialty areas including surgery. D.O.s are trained to consider the health of the whole person and use their hands to help diagnose and treat their patients.

***The contributing physician to this article was Fred G. Freitag, DO, the associate director at the Diamond Headache Clinic in Chicago, Illinois**