

# Migraine headaches and food

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## What is a migraine headache?

A migraine headache is a recurring (comes and goes often), throbbing type of headache.

- They happen in about 1 in 4 children during puberty. Puberty is the time when a child's body begins to mature and change into an adult body.
- Girls have more migraines due to changes in hormones.

## What causes migraines?

Migraines result from changes in brain chemicals.

- These chemical changes can “excite” the brain and lead to headaches.
- Because of this, many factors that also excite the brain may cause headaches. These factors are called “triggers.”
- A child is more prone to have migraines if their parents also have them.

## What are some common migraine triggers?

Common migraine triggers may include any of these items.

### Stress on the body or brain, such as:

- Lack of sleep or changes in sleep schedule
- Physical activity
- Changes in hormone levels, such as menstruation (also called a girl's “period”)
- Motion sickness

### Food or meal changes, such as:

- Hunger
- Changes in mealtimes
- Drinking alcohol, such as beer or wine, often
- For some children – certain foods like caffeine, chocolate and aspartame may trigger migraines.

### Things outside the body, such as:

- Glaring lights
- Loud noises
- Changes in the weather
- Strong smells, such as cigarette smoke, fumes or perfume

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## What are the symptoms?

Your child may have one or more of these:

- Pain, which may be:
  - Severe
  - Throbbing
  - Happen on one or both sides of the head
  - Made worse by physical activity
  - Made better with sleep
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Changes in vision
- Dizziness
- Cold hands
- Pale skin
- Sensitivity to light

Migraines may last for a few hours, a full day or longer.

## What is the treatment?

Keeping a headache diary can help you learn more about what triggers your child's migraines. Some treatment guidelines may include:

- Avoid triggers and foods that could cause a migraine.
- Get enough rest and sleep, but do not sleep too much.
- Get regular exercise.
- Do things to relieve stress, such as:
  - Relaxing and deep breathing
  - Thinking about a calm place (visualization) with eyes closed
  - Doing yoga
  - Doing biofeedback
  - Keeping the same routine each day as much as possible
- Your child's doctor may talk with you about medicines that may be helpful for your child. Some medicines can help prevent or stop migraines for some children.

## What is the headache diet?

The National Headache Foundation supports a diet that avoids foods with tyramine. The diet is called a tyramine restricted diet. While it is not based on scientific findings, it may be helpful for your child when combined with other migraine treatments.

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- Tyramine is a chemical found in protein foods. When these foods ripen, age or spoil, the tyramine level goes up.
- The word “tyramine” is not on food labels, so you must know what foods to avoid.
- Throw out leftover foods that contain tyramine after 48 hours.
- A complete list of foods to include and avoid are listed on the next page.

## What about my child’s favorite foods?

- At the start of the diet, your child should avoid all foods that could trigger a migraine.
- Help your child keep a diary of their headaches and the foods they eat. Your child will know by trial and error over time if their favorite food triggers their headaches.
- Add back one food at a time.
- After a follow-up visit with your child’s doctor, your child may be able to eat some foods again, starting one at a time. If the headaches return, your child should not eat that food again.
- Change your child’s diet to include parts of their favorite foods that do not cause problems. For example, some children are able to eat pizza with cheese, and some feel better eating only the pizza crust with tomato sauce on it.
- Your child’s response to treatment and medicines may also allow adding more foods to their diet.

## What other food tips can help my child?

- Eating certain foods should trigger a headache within 12 to 24 hours.
- Test trigger foods one at a time.
- Fruits and vegetables are less likely to trigger a migraine.
- It is best to prepare and eat fresh foods, especially high protein foods.
- Throw away all leftovers if not used within 1 to 2 days. Freeze food if you plan to store it for more than 2 days.

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# Migraine headaches and food, continued

Read food labels carefully. This chart contains general guidelines for tyramine foods.

Foods	Foods allowed	Foods to avoid
<b>Drinks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decaffeinated coffee and soda</li> <li>• Fruit juice</li> <li>• Club soda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular coffee, tea and soda</li> <li>• Chocolate milk</li> <li>• Cocoa</li> </ul>
<b>Meat, fish and poultry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh prepared meats, fish and poultry</li> <li>• Fresh shellfish (clams, lobster, oysters, shrimp, scallops and squid)</li> <li>• Eggs</li> <li>• Canned tuna and tuna salad (with allowed ingredients) – must eat the day you open it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aged, canned, cured or processed meats and ham</li> <li>• Chicken livers</li> <li>• Aged game</li> <li>• Hot dogs and sausages</li> <li>• Bologna</li> <li>• Salami</li> <li>• Pepperoni</li> <li>• Summer sausage</li> <li>• Any meat prepared with meat tenderizers or soy sauce</li> </ul>
<b>Dairy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Milk (whole, 2%, skim, dried, sweetened, condensed, evaporated and eggnog)</li> <li>• Yogurt</li> <li>• Cheese (American, cottage, Gouda, farmer, ricotta, cream cheese and Velveeta)</li> <li>• Sour cream – ½ cup or less</li> <li>• Buttermilk – limit to 4 ounces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aged cheeses, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Blue cheese</li> <li>– Boursault</li> <li>– Brick</li> <li>– Brie</li> <li>– Camembert</li> <li>– Cheddar</li> <li>– Swiss Roquefort</li> <li>– Stilton</li> <li>– Mozzarella</li> <li>– Parmesan</li> <li>– Provolone</li> <li>– Romano</li> <li>– Emmentaler</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Breads, cereals and starchy vegetables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commercial breads</li> <li>• All hot and dry cereals</li> <li>• White potato</li> <li>• Sweet potato</li> <li>• Rice</li> <li>• Stuffing</li> <li>• Pasta (macaroni, egg noodles, rotini and ravioli)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sourdough bread</li> <li>• Breads and crackers containing cheese or chocolate</li> </ul>

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<b>Vegetables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use caution with navy beans, pinto beans, raw onion and black-eyed peas</li> <li>• All other vegetables allowed except those listed in the right column</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad beans</li> <li>• Italian beans</li> <li>• Lima lentils</li> <li>• Snow peas</li> <li>• Fava beans</li> <li>• Soybeans</li> <li>• Sauerkraut</li> <li>• Tofu and other prepared foods from soybeans</li> <li>• Miso and teriyaki sauce</li> </ul>
<b>Fruits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apples</li> <li>• Cherries</li> <li>• Peaches</li> <li>• Apricots</li> <li>• All other fruits except those listed in the right column</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit to ½ cup a day:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Avocado</li> <li>– Banana</li> <li>– Citrus (orange, grapefruit, lemon and lime)</li> <li>– Figs</li> <li>– Raisins</li> <li>– Papaya</li> <li>– Passion fruit</li> <li>– Red plums</li> <li>– Raspberries</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Soups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cream soups made from foods allowed</li> <li>• Homemade broths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canned soups</li> <li>• Soup cubes</li> <li>• Bouillon cubes</li> <li>• Soup bases with autolyzed yeast or monosodium glutamate (MSG)</li> </ul>
<b>Desserts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fruit</li> <li>• Sherbets</li> <li>• Ice cream</li> <li>• Cakes</li> <li>• Cookies</li> <li>• Jell-O</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use caution with foods that contain chocolate</li> </ul>
<b>Sweets and hard candy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sugar</li> <li>• Jelly</li> <li>• Jam</li> <li>• Honey</li> <li>• Syrup</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chocolate</li> <li>• Candies</li> <li>• Licorice</li> <li>• Molasses and chocolate syrup</li> </ul>

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Foods	Foods allowed	Foods to avoid
Other foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use salt in moderation</li> <li>• Limit to less than ¼ cup a day – vinegars and commercial salad dressings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soy sauce</li> <li>• Monosodium glutamate (MSG)</li> <li>• Brewer's yeast</li> <li>• Meat tenderizers</li> <li>• Accent and seasoned salt</li> <li>• Commercial frozen TV dinners</li> <li>• Pizza with cheese</li> <li>• Nuts and seeds, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Peanuts and peanut butter</li> <li>– Pumpkin seeds</li> <li>– Walnuts</li> <li>– Pecans</li> <li>– Sesame seeds</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Any pickled, preserved or marinated foods</li> </ul>

Please ask your child’s nutritionist or doctor if you have any questions about your child’s diet.

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child’s doctor or a member of your child’s healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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