

Migraine headaches, diet and healthy habits



What is a migraine headache?

Migraine headaches are often called migraines. They are a type of headache that can happen in adults and children. Migraines often start off mild and then get worse.

- A migraine is not just a headache. It is a disabling neurological disease that affects people of all ages.
- Migraines impact children differently than adults. Parents can help their child manage triggers and find treatment options when they learn how the disease affects their child.

What are the symptoms?

Your child may have 1 or more of these:

- Pain that can be:
 - Severe
 - Throbbing
 - On 1 or both sides of the head
 - Worse with physical activity
 - Better with sleep
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Changes in vision or seeing
- Dizziness
- Pale skin
- Sensitive to light

Migraines may last for a few hours, a full day or longer. Migraine symptoms are different for each person.

What causes migraines?

- Migraines are caused by changes in brain chemicals. The chemical changes can excite the brain and lead to headaches.
- Certain things may cause headaches. These are called triggers.
- A child is more likely to have migraines if their parents or grandparents also have them.
- Most migraines in children start suddenly. There is nothing they did or did not do to trigger the migraine.
 - Some children have migraines that have a cause or trigger.
 - Keep a headache diary to help find patterns and triggers that may cause the migraines.

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Migraine headaches, diet and healthy habits, continued

What is the treatment?

Some treatment guidelines include:

- Avoid triggers and foods that could cause a migraine.
- Enough rest and sleep. Do not sleep too much.
- Regular exercise.
- Stress relief activities, such as:
 - Deep breathing.
 - Thinking about a calm place with eyes closed.
 - Doing yoga.
 - Doing biofeedback or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).
 - Keeping the same routine each day when possible.

Your child's doctor may talk with you about medicines for your child. Some medicines can help prevent or stop migraines in some children.

What are some healthy habits to help prevent migraines?

Common migraine triggers are related to sleep, eating, exercise, drinking and stress (SEEDS). Have your child follow these tips to help prevent migraines.

Sleep

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day. Most children need 8 to 10 hours of sleep.
- Do not sleep too much on weekends or too little on weekdays.
- Go to sleep in a quiet, dark room without TV, music or other electronics (phones or tablets).

Eat regular meals

- Eat regular meals 3 times a day. Include proteins, fruits, vegetables and carbohydrates.
- Do not go more than 4 hours without eating during the day. Do not skip meals. Fast changes in blood sugar may trigger a headache.

Exercise regularly

- Moderate exercise 3 to 5 times each week helps reduce stress and keeps your child's body healthy.
- Too much exercise or inconsistent patterns of exercise may trigger headaches.

Drink plenty of fluids

- Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Your child should take a water bottle to school.
- Drink more clear liquids (water or sports drink) during a migraine.
- Avoid caffeine. It can cause migraines to be worse.
- Do not drink alcohol.

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Stress

- Relaxation skills and stress management may help reduce migraines.
- Consider counseling if your child is having stress or anxiety.

What is the low tyramine diet?

The National Headache Foundation supports a diet that avoids foods with tyramine. The diet is called a low tyramine diet. It is not based on research, but it may be helpful if used with other migraine treatments.

- Tyramine is a chemical found in protein foods. Tyramine levels go up when foods ripen, age or spoil.
- The word tyramine is not on food labels. You must know what foods to avoid.
- Throw out leftover foods that contain tyramine after 48 hours.
- A list of tyramine foods are 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 the foods they eat and when they have migraines.
- Add back 1 food at a time.
- Your child will know by trial and error if their favorite food triggers their migraines.
- Change your child's diet to include parts of their favorite foods that do not cause problems. For example, some children can eat pizza with cheese and some feel better eating only the crust with tomato sauce.
- Your child's response to treatment and medicines may also allow adding more foods to their diet.

What other things can help my child?

- Use a food journal or calendar, such as the app Migraine Buddy, to find possible triggers.
- Trigger foods often cause a migraine within 12 to 24 hours.
- Test trigger foods 1 at a time.
- Fruits and vegetables are less likely to trigger a migraine.
- It is best to prepare and eat fresh foods, mainly 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.
- Give rescue medicines as prescribed.
- Try to sit in a dark, quiet room when a migraine starts.

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

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

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

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Foods	Foods allowed	Foods to avoid
Sweets and hard candy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jam • Honey • Syrup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licorice • Molasses and chocolate syrup
Other foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit salt • Limit to less than ¼ cup a day: vinegars and bottled salad dressings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soy sauce • Monosodium glutamate (MSG) • Brewer's yeast • Meat tenderizers • Accent and seasoned salt • Frozen dinners • Pizza with cheese • Any pickled, preserved or marinated foods • Nuts and seeds, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Peanuts and peanut butter – Pumpkin seeds – Walnuts – Pecans – Sesame seeds

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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