

Migraine Triggers

“Triggers” are specific factors that may increase your risk of having a migraine attack. The migraine sufferer has inherited a sensitive nervous system that under certain circumstances can lead to migraine.

Triggers do not ‘cause’ migraine. Instead, they are thought to activate processes that cause migraine in people who are prone to the condition. A certain trigger will not induce a migraine in every person; and, in a single migraine sufferer, a trigger may not cause a migraine every time. By keeping a headache diary, you will be able to identify some triggers for your particular headaches.

Once you have identified triggers, it will be easier for you to avoid them and reduce your chances of having a migraine attack.”

—American Council for Headache Education

Categories	Triggers	Examples
Dietary	Skipping meals/fasting Specific foods Medications	<i>See reverse</i> Overuse of over-the-counter medications can cause rebound headaches (e.g. using ibuprofen, Excedrin Migraine more than 2 days per week). Also, missed medication doses and certain medications (e.g. nitroglycerine, indomethacin) may cause headaches.
Sleep	Changes in sleep patterns	Napping, oversleeping, too little sleep
Hormonal	Estrogen level changes and fluctuations	Menstrual cycles, birth control pills, hormone replacement therapies, peri-menopause, menopause, ovulation
Environmental	Weather Bright lights Odors/pollution Other	Weather and temperature changes, extreme heat or cold, humidity, barometric pressure changes Bright or glaring lights, fluorescent lighting, flashing lights or screens Smog, smoke, perfumes, chemical odors High altitude, airplane travel
Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Periods of high stress, including life changes ▪ Accumulated stress ▪ Reacting quickly and easily to stress ▪ Repressed emotions 	Factors related to stress include anxiety, worry, shock, depression, excitement, mental fatigue, loss and grief. Both “bad stress” and “good stress” can be triggers. How we perceive and react to situations can trigger (or prevent) migraines. Other triggers can include unrealistic timelines or expectations of oneself.
Stress letdown		Weekends, vacations, ending a project or stressful task (including presentations, papers, or exams)
Physical	Overexertion Injuries Visual triggers Becoming tired or fatigued	Over-exercising when out of shape, exercising in heat, marathon running Eyestrain (if you wear glasses, make sure your prescription is current), bright or glaring lights, fluorescent lighting, flashing lights or computer screens

Dietary Triggers

Food triggers do not necessarily contribute to migraines in all individuals, and particular foods may trigger attacks in certain people only on occasion. Be your own expert by keeping a journal of foods you have eaten before a migraine attack and see whether the removal or reduction of certain foods from your diet improves your headaches.

Skipping meals, fasting, and low blood sugar can also trigger migraines. If you're unable to follow a normal eating schedule, pack snacks.

Food item	Not known to trigger migraines	Possible triggers
Beverages	Fruit juice, club soda, noncola soda (7-Up, gingerale), decaffeinated coffee, herbal tea, soy milk, rice milk. Limit caffeine sources to 2 cups/day (coffee, tea, cola).	Chocolate and cocoa. Alcoholic beverages (especially red wine, beer, and sherry). Caffeine (even in small amounts) may be a trigger for some people.
Fruits	Any except those to avoid. Limit citrus fruits to ½ cup/day. Limit banana to ½ per day.	Figs, raisins, papayas, avocados (especially if overripe), red plums, overripe bananas.
Vegetables	Any except those to avoid.	Beans such as broad, fava, garbanzo, Italian, lima, navy, pinto, pole. Sauerkraut, string beans, raw garlic, snow peas, olives, pickles, onions (except for flavoring).
Bread & Grains	Most commercial breads, English muffins, melba toast, crackers, RyKrisp, bagel. All hot and dry cereals. Grains such as rice, barley, millet, quinoa, bulgur. Corn meal and noodles.	Freshly baked yeast bread. Fresh yeast coffee cake, doughnuts, sourdough bread. Breads and crackers containing cheese, including pizza. Any product containing chocolate or nuts.
Dairy Products	Milk (2% or skim). Cheese: American, cottage, farmer, ricotta, cream, Velveeta. Yogurt: (limit to ½ cup per day).	Cultured dairy products (buttermilk, sour cream). Chocolate milk. Cheese: blue, brick (natural), Gouda, Gruyere, mozzarella, Parmesan, provolone, romano, Roquefort, cheddar, Swiss (emmentaler), Stilton, Brie types and Camembert types.
Meat, fish, poultry	Fresh or frozen turkey, chicken, fish, beef, lamb, veal, pork. Egg (limit to 3 eggs/week). Tuna or tuna salad.	Aged, canned, cured or processed meat, including ham or game, pickled herring, salted dried fish, sardines, anchovies, chicken livers, sausage, bologna, pepperoni, salami, summer sausage, hot dogs, pâté, caviar. Any food prepared with meat tenderizer, soy sauce or brewer's yeast. Any food containing nitrates, nitrites, or tyramine.
Soups	Soups made from foods allowed in diet, homemade broths.	Canned soup, soup or bouillon cubes, soup base with autolytic yeast or MSG. <i>Read labels.</i>
Desserts	Fruit allowed in diet. Any cake, pudding, cookies, or ice cream without chocolate or nuts. JELL-O.	Chocolate ice cream, pudding, cookies, cakes, or pies. Mincemeat pie. Nuts. Any yeast-containing doughs and pastries.
Sweets	Sugar, jelly, jam, honey, hard candy	
Miscellaneous	Salt in moderation, lemon juice, butter or margarine, cooking oil, whipped cream, and white vinegar. Commercial salad dressings in small amounts as long as they don't have additives to avoid.	Nutrasweet, monosodium glutamate (MSG), yeast/yeast extract, meat tenderizer (Accent), seasoned salt, mixed dishes, pizza, cheese sauce, macaroni and cheese, beef stroganoff, cheese blintzes, lasagna, frozen TV dinners, chocolate. Nuts and nut butters. Pumpkin, sesame and sunflower seeds. Anything fermented, pickled or marinated. Some aspirin medications that contain caffeine. Excessive amounts of Niacin (Niacinamide is fine). Excessive Vitamin A (over 25,000 I.U. daily).