

HEADFIRST

Newsletter / January 2021



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**NHF IS A PROUD ALLY TO THE 40 MILLION INDIVIDUALS WHO LIVE WITH
HEADACHE DISORDERS AND MIGRAINE DISEASE**

Your contributions help the National Headache Foundation continue to raise awareness, advocate for those experiencing headache disorders and migraine disease, and provide easy access to the resources and research our community needs.

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★ **FEATURED ARTICLE:**

New Year's Resolutions and Your Health



Exercise and improved fitness, losing weight and eating healthier are not just resolutions, they are important aspects of healthy living, and may reduce the impact of headache disorders and migraine disease. At the same time, when beginning these lifestyle changes, it's best to do so in moderation.

If you are kicking up your exercise routine in 2021, perhaps as a result of a resolution, you should know exercising releases endorphins and has other benefits that aid in pain management. However, overly strenuous exercise can have serious consequences for individuals with migraine and headache disorders. Over exercising can lead to fatigue, decreased oxygen supply, dehydration, muscle tension and spasms, which are often triggers for migraine attacks. An exertional headache is a type of headache specifically triggered by physical activity.

If you have already committed or are considering a new workout program in 2021, honor the needs of your body and avoid pushing yourself too hard. Stay hydrated and drink at least the recommended 64 ounces of water a day to avoid dehydration while you exercise. Maintain good form while working out to help reduce the risk of exercise-induced headache. You might also consider adding in yoga or other low-impact exercise routines that could help prevent or relieve migraine symptoms. Additionally, avoid pre-workout drinks that are loaded with caffeine, sugar substitutes and stimulants that are known triggers for headache and migraine.

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is critical to managing migraine disease and headache disorders. Diets that cut out certain foods can keep you from the vital nutrients and satiation that prevents migraine attacks. Additionally, diet foods or supplements may include low-calorie ingredient substitutes like aspartame, MSG and even more that are known to cause migraine. Also, eating too-few calories a day will send the body's hunger hormone, ghrelin, into overdrive and disrupt the delicate hormonal balance necessary to prevent headache and migraine attacks. To eat healthier and keep headache and migraine under control, commit to consuming sufficient calories (the FDA recommends adult women consume 1,600 – 2,400 calories per day and adult men consume 2,000 – 3,000 calories per day) and a balanced diet. Also consider eliminating high-tyramine foods from your diet, which are known migraine triggers. A full list of these foods can be found here.

If you are among the 50% of people exercising more in 2021, the 48% of people resolving to lose weight or the 39% of people dieting, consider consulting with your headache specialist. Together, you can develop a plan that helps you achieve your 2021 health goals without triggering headache and migraine attacks. In fact, a healthier lifestyle may help improve the symptoms and frequency of your headache and migraine attacks.

? DID YOU KNOW?

[Research has linked migraine to anxiety](#) and as many as 40% of people living with migraine disease have experienced some form of depression. For those with migraine disease, keep in mind that migraine attacks commonly occur after large amounts of stress and/or excitement. Doctors suggest:

- Unclenching your jaw throughout the day, which may relieve tension and prevent muscle spasm
- Being mindful of your posture, especially if you are working at a computer, and frequently readjust by rolling your shoulders back
- Drinking the recommended 64 ounces of water a day
- Committing to a daily routine that includes regular sleep and exercise

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IN THE NEWS



Doctors at leading headache clinics across the country are reporting an increase in new patients as well as worsening symptoms for existing patients. Patients who have had COVID-19 may experience viral headache during their illness, which can be a lingering symptom that persists or transitions to episodic or daily persistent headache. More

commonly, headache specialists are attributing this recent increase in headache disorders to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on everyday life. This can include increased alcohol consumption, irregular sleeping and eating habits and alterations to daily routines. Another contributing factor may be the stress caused by the pandemic. For those living with migraine disease and headache disorders, disruptions in treatment that began in March 2020 resulting from non-essential healthcare operations being closed, may be to blame for worsening symptoms now.

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TIPS & TRICKS

Since last March, there have been many changes to how students learn. For students living with migraine disease and headache disorders, the changes to the classroom, due to COVID-19, may be the accommodations they have been seeking for years. Data indicates that 8 - 12% of adolescents are affected by migraine severe enough to miss school days. The eLearning format allows students the time off they need for migraine attacks without missing instruction or assignments. This new format makes it easier for students to catch up on curriculum they may have missed during an attack.



Most notably, students with migraine disease at schools with a start time at 8:30 a.m. (the start time recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics) or later report lower headache frequency compared to those with earlier start times. Digital learning has made it possible for students to sleep later which may be linked to fewer migraine attacks. As the COVID-19 vaccine rolls out and students return to in-person learning, it is important to keep these benefits top of mind.

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Listen to [Heads UP](#), the National Headache Foundation's official weekly podcast where experts discuss a range of topics related to headache disorders. You can also now listen to Heads UP while on the go and on a variety of devices, as it's now available in the app store for iPhone, Google and Android.

Recent episodes include:

Episode 82: Resolutions and Goal Settings



Episode 81: Study Data on Psilocybin and Treatment for Migraine

Episode 80: Disability Benefits and Headache Disorders

ASK THE EXPERTS

QUESTION:

I gained a lot of weight after my two pregnancies and I want to get healthier in 2021, but I live with chronic migraine. Can you tell me the best diet and exercise program for someone who has migraine?

ANSWER:

Being a busy mother with two little ones and chronic migraine yet interested in working on diet and exercise! My hat is off to you!

One of the best overall diet plans to review is the South Beach Diet. The first weeks can be fairly restrictive, so you might order the book in paperback, and start by reading the book. Then decide whether you want to start with the beginning weeks or simply start on their maintenance plan.

This approach allows for healthy eating without resorting to complicated strategies or using a high protein/super low carb diet that often makes chronic migraine worse and is virtually impossible to sustain in the long run. But overall, calories really do matter, so counting calories or at least keeping track of them is important. Plenty of fruits, vegetables, healthy grains and less red meat is important.

As for exercise, starting with a regular walking program, adding in stretching exercises, then squats/planks/crunches. Or regular walking, and combining with a class, now likely online, perhaps yoga. Short bursts of exercise have been shown to be effective in increasing strength and may be all the time you



Jan Lewis Brandes, MS, MD

have. If, however, you have access and time, bicycling, swimming, Pilates, or even running can be great for physical and mental health.

Make sure that your blood pressure is normal, and your physician okays an exercise program for you. And keep hydrated, stretch before starting exercise and avoid carbonated beverages, sweetened and unsweetened. Caffeinated coffee in the morning may help to reduce appetite and give you an energy boost!

But if you are limited in terms of space or without much access to the outdoors because of COVID-19 restrictions, put on fun dance music and dance with your little ones for an hour or so a day! That can be quite a workout!

And lastly, make sure that your chronic migraine preventive medications are not aggravating weight gain or appetite. Some of the newer medications, the CGRP monoclonal antibodies now used for migraine prevention, have no impact on appetite or weight gain, important when you are trying to get healthier! And congratulations on your determination!

*Jan Lewis Brandes, MS, MD
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NHF Board Member*

Each month we will feature your questions and our answers about headache disorders and migraine disease in the newsletter. If you have a question about migraine disease and headache disorders, please email us and keep an eye out for the answer from one of our doctors!

Email: info@headaches.org

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