

# Identifying a dietary cause for your migraines

Leicester Balance Centre

Information for Patients

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## What is migraine?

Migraine is a common cause of vertigo, where everything feels like it is spinning around you, dizziness and feelings of imbalance.

People having migraine that causes dizziness (vestibular migraine) often have a headache but not always. Other symptoms may include feeling sick (nausea), vomiting, sensitivity to light or sound, strange or unpleasant taste in the mouth, or notice an unusual or bad smell, or visual disturbance such as zig-zag lines or flashing/ sparkling lights.

You may have some or even none of these symptoms of migraine alongside your dizziness, or in the few days before or after it.

## What causes migraines?

The underlying cause of migraine is not clear as many factors seem to be involved. Triggers can vary from person to person although there are some common triggers.

Migraine often runs in families, we see this in about 60% of cases.

Lifestyle choices can have a big impact on migraine symptoms. The examples below can cause a migraine for many people:

- Missed, delayed or irregular meals.
- Too little or too much sleep.
- Stress levels.
- Certain health conditions.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## What are the common triggers?

It is important to be aware that a trigger can cause the onset of symptoms up to 72 hours (3 days) later. This can make it difficult to identify what it is that may have set it off. Keeping a diary of your food, period (menstrual cycle), sleep and any particular stresses can be very helpful.

Some common triggers are given below:

- **Food** - this is covered on the next page. Looking at and making changes to your diet is often the first step in tackling symptoms of migraine. It is sometimes possible to greatly reduce the occurrence of migraines just by identifying and stopping certain food(s). It may mean that medication or other treatments are not needed, or needed less often.
- Dehydration—not drinking enough throughout the day can cause symptoms to arise.
- **Emotional or mental stresses** - for many people an increase in their stress levels can result in having symptoms. For some people though it can occur with a decrease in stress levels. This includes feelings of excitement, shock, tension, anger, worry, depression, anxiety.
- **Hormonal** - fluctuations in hormonal levels around your period (menstruation), menopause, puberty, pregnancy, use of the contraceptive pill, hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- **Physical stresses** - over exertion, lack of sleep from poor sleeping patterns or late nights, change in sleeping pattern, muscular tension in neck/shoulders, travel (many people with migraine have had travel sickness in the past also), dental problems, congestion of the nose or sinus, eye strain.
- **Environmental** - pressure changes in the weather, bright light (from the sun or from artificial lighting), flashing lights, loud noise, strong or penetrating smells, stuffy atmosphere, smoking.
- **Medication** - some types of sleeping tablets, the combined contraceptive pill, HRT. Always speak to your doctor or pharmacist if you think any medication you are taking may be triggering migraines **before** making any changes.

## Finding out if diet may cause your migraines

Many people can reduce their migraine symptoms with simple diet changes. It is suggested that the following foods be completely cut out of your diet for 2 months before gradually reintroducing to see if a particular food can be identified as a trigger for you.

When reintroducing a food it is important to give at least 2 weeks between reintroducing one food and then the next one, or you may get confused as to which one is responsible for triggering your symptoms.

If no symptoms are triggered by a particular food it is unlikely it is playing a part in your migraines and you can continue to have it in your diet. If you find it is triggering symptoms, it is worth leaving out of your diet completely to avoid the migraines.

- **Cheese** - this includes cheese on pizza, in sauces, added in to other foods such as mashed potato, in a chunk by itself.
- **Caffeine** - this includes tea, coffee, cola and many energy drinks. Most people are ok with decaffeinated tea and coffee but there is a small amount of caffeine still present in decaf tea/coffee.
- **Chocolate** - either by itself or in hot drinks, sauces or puddings.
- **Citrus fruits** - these are lemons, limes, oranges and grapefruits. It includes any form of the fruit such as the juice, the zest in a cake and the flesh of the fruit.
- **Monosodium glutamate (MSG) often used in Chinese food** - it is used as a flavour enhancer and worth looking at food labels where necessary. If you are particularly fond of Chinese takeaway it is worth asking them if they can leave the MSG out of your dishes when they cook it, many are happy to help.
- **Alcohol - red wine, sherry and beer** - although for some people any alcohol can trigger their symptoms, it is particularly common with these 3. Champagne is also known to aggravate symptoms.

Some less common food triggers but worth considering after trying the above are:

- Cured or processed meats such as bacon, smoked or canned ham, salami and corned beef.
- Other dairy products such as eggs, butter, milk and yoghurt.

It will help to keep a food diary; an example is given on the next page. Be as detailed as possible in your notes in order to get the most information to identify potential patterns in symptoms and triggers to them.

## Contact details

Should you have any queries regarding your diet please leave a message for The Balance Rehab Team on **0116 258 6156** and a member of the team will return your call when they are available.

**Example of a migraine food diary** (courtesy of [www.vestibularmigraine.co.uk](http://www.vestibularmigraine.co.uk))

Day and Date	Wake up time	Break-fast	Snack	Lunch	Snack	Dinner	Time to bed	Any stresses?	Migraine?
Mon 01/10/20	6.45am Slept well	Choco-cereal Orange juice x2	Banana, 2 cups of tea	Ham sandwich, crisps, Water	Coffee	Roast chicken, salad, chips	11.30pm	No	Yes, flashing lights and dizzy for 1 hour

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
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Previous reference:

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