

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. You might feel like the room is spinning. This can last for a few seconds through to a few days. Or you may have a feeling of imbalance and wooziness in your head. This can make you feel dizzy, lightheaded, unsteady, and feeling sick (nauseous). This too can last for a few second or may last longer, even days.

People who have migraines that cause dizziness (vestibular migraine) often have a headache, but not always. Other symptoms may include:

- feeling sick (nausea),
- vomiting,
- sensitivity to light and / or sound,
- a strange or unpleasant taste in the mouth,
- an unusual or bad smell,
- 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?

We are not sure what causes migraines. This is because there are many factors involved. Triggers are different from person to person. There are some common triggers.

Migraine often runs in families, we see this in about 6 out of 10 cases.

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

Lifestyle choices can have a big impact on migraine symptoms. Here are examples of what can cause a migraine in many people:

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

What are the common triggers?

Triggers might not cause symptoms right away. It can take up to 72 hours (3 days) for the symptoms to start. This can make it difficult to know what the triggers are. Keeping a diary of your food, period (menstrual cycle), sleep and any stresses can be very helpful.

Some common triggers are:

- **Food and drink:** You may want to make changes to your diet. This is often the first step in tackling symptoms. It is sometimes possible to reduce how often you get migraines by identifying and not eating certain food(s) or drinks. This means you may not need medicines or other treatments, or need it less often.
- **Dehydration:** Not drinking enough water throughout the day.
- **Emotional or mental stresses:** For many people an increase in their stress levels can cause it. For some people it can happen when stress levels become lower. This includes feelings or excitement, shock, tension, anger, worry, depression, anxiety.
- **Hormonal:** Changes in hormonal levels around your period (menstruation), menopause, puberty, pregnancy, use of the contraceptive pill, hormone replacement therapy (HRT).
- **Physical stresses:** Here are some physical stresses:
 - overworking yourself,
 - 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,
 - some exercises and even sex can trigger migraine,
- **Environmental:** Changes around you like pressure changes in the weather, bright light (from the sun or from artificial lighting), flashing lights, computer screens, loud noise, strong or penetrating smells, stuffy atmosphere, smoking.
- **Medicines:** 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 your diet may be causing your migraines

Many people can reduce their migraine symptoms with simple diet changes. We recommend stopping the following foods completely for 2 months. You can then slowly reintroduce them to see if a food is 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. You can continue to have it in your diet. If you find it is triggering symptoms, you may want to leave it 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, or in a chunk by itself.
- **Caffeine:** this includes tea, coffee, cola and many energy drinks. Most people are ok with decaffeinated tea and coffee. There is a small amount of caffeine 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. You may want to check food labels for this. If you like Chinese takeaway you may want to ask to leave the MSG out of your dishes when they cook it, many are happy to help.
- **Alcohol (red wine, sherry and beer):** for some people any alcohol can trigger their symptoms. It is the most common with red wine, sherry, berry and champagne.

Here are some less common food triggers but worth thinking about 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 of this is on the next page. Be as detailed as possible in your notes to get the most information. This will help to find patterns in your symptoms and the triggers to them.

Contact details

Should you have any questions about your diet please leave a message for The Balance Rehab Team on **0116 258 6156**. 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)

Day and Date	Wake up time	Breakfast	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

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