

Preventing Migraine Headaches: Triggers



The first step in preventing migraines is to learn what triggers them. You may then be able to control your triggers to avoid or reduce the severity of your migraines.

Know your triggers

Be aware that you may have more than one trigger, and that some triggers may work together. Common migraine triggers include:

- **Food and nutrition.** Skipping meals or not drinking enough water can trigger headaches. So can certain foods, such as caffeine, chocolate, artificial sweeteners, monosodium glutamate (MSG), aged cheese, or sausage.
- **Alcohol.** Red wine and other alcoholic beverages are common migraine triggers.
- **Chemicals.** Scents, cleaning products, gasoline, glue, perfume, and paint can be triggers. So can tobacco smoke, including secondhand smoke.
- **Emotions.** Stress can trigger headaches or make them worse once they start.
- **Sleep disruption.** Staying up late, sleeping late, and traveling across time zones can disrupt your sleep cycle, triggering headaches.
- **Hormones.** Many women notice that migraines tend to happen at a certain point in their menstrual cycle. Birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy may also trigger migraines.
- **Environment and weather.** Air travel, changes in altitude, air pressure changes, hot sun, or bright or flashing lights can be triggers.
- **Medicine overuse.** Frequent use of pain medicines for headache pain can also cause a headache. This may also be called rebound headache.

Control your triggers

Here are some tips to help control triggers:

- **Stay away from triggers if you can.** For example, stay clear of alcohol and foods that trigger your headaches. Use unscented household products. Keep regular sleep habits. Manage stress to help control emotional triggers. Exercise can reduce stress and migraines.
- **Change your behavior at times when triggers can't be avoided.** For example, make sure to get enough rest and drink plenty of water while you're traveling. Make sure to carry a hat, sunglasses, and your medicines. Be alert for migraine symptoms, so you can treat a migraine early if it happens. Keeping a headache diary helps to figure out triggers.
- **Don't overuse headache medicines.** Talk to your provider about how to reduce your need for headache medicines.

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