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A Natural Guide to Managing Migraines

August 5, 2009 — Nearly 30 million people in the United States are affected by migraine headaches, according to the Migraine Research Foundation. A migraine is not simply a bad headache. Migraines are chronic headaches that can cause significant pain for hours or even days.



Many migraine sufferers feel their only option is to take prescription or over-the-counter medications to help reduce the frequency and severity of the migraine. However, according to Amy Horton, DC, an assistant professor and faculty clinician at Northwestern Health Sciences University, there are many effective natural treatment options that may help.

Dr. Horton offers these simple reminders for people prone to migraines:

- **Relaxation.** Practicing meditation, yoga, or relaxation exercises may be a key step in reducing stress, which may cause migraines;
- **Rest.** Find a quiet, dark place to rest if you feel a migraine starting. Placing an ice pack on the location of the pain and/or on the back of the neck may also help;
- **Sleep.** Get plenty of sleep, and keep it regular. For some people, an erratic sleep schedule can cause a migraine;
- **Watch what you eat.** Foods such as cheese, chocolate, and citrus fruits have been shown to trigger migraines. Other culprits may be food additives such as monosodium glutamate (MSG) and aspartame (NutraSweet)
- **Jot it down.** Keeping a journal may help you determine what foods, activities or other patterns trigger a migraine.



Dr. Horton also suggests these natural alternatives for treating migraines:

- **Acupuncture.** A number of clinical trials have found that acupuncture may be helpful for headache pain;
- **Biofeedback.** This relaxation technique teaches you how to monitor and control muscle tension and other physical responses related to stress;
- **Chiropractic care.** Chiropractors are trained to help identify migraine triggers, suggest diet and activity modifications to help prevent migraines, as well as provide acute headache relief;

- **Massage.** Massage may help reduce the frequency of migraines, and can help you sleep better, which may in turn help prevent migraines; and

- **Herbs and supplements.** Some evidence indicates that the herbs feverfew and butterbur may prevent or reduce the severity of migraines. A high dose of riboflavin (vitamin B-2) also may prevent migraines by correcting tiny deficiencies in the brain cells. Herbs and supplements should be taken under the direction of your health care practitioner.



Source: Northwestern Health Sciences University, www.nwhealth.edu/nwtoday/index.html