

Causes of Migraines and Headaches

Last year 50 million Americans sought medical attention due to the pain of their headaches. Over 26 million people searched for powerful migraine headache relief.

During the 1980s researchers found that the diagnosis of a migraine headache had increased more than 55% in females, and that women in their 20s had both the fastest increase and highest number of migraines than any other age group.

There are over 129 different classifications for the causes of headaches and many of these factors also cause migraine headaches. Some of these factors are listed below:

Dietary Factors

alcoholic beverages, foods containing tyramine, aged cheeses, Chianti wine, pickled herring, dried smoked fish, sour cream, yogurt, yeast extracts, chocolate, citrus fruits, dairy products, onions, nuts, beans, caffeine (excess, withdrawal), fatty foods, food additives: nitrites (e.g., in hot dogs, luncheon meats), monosodium glutamate (MSG), aspartame artificial sweetener (NutraSweet, Equal)

Environmental Factors

bright light, flickering light sources, cool white fluorescent lighting, perfumes, strong odors, fumes from industrial complexes, air pollution, secondhand cigarette smoke, motion travel, complex visual patterns (e.g., checks, zig-zag lines), weather changes

Lifestyle Factors

stress, disrupted sleep patterns, "letdown", fatigue, irregular eating habits, cigarette smoking

Medications

blood vessel dilating drugs (e.g., nitroglycerin), drugs for high blood pressure (e.g., hydralazine, reserpine), diuretics, anti-asthma medications (e.g., aminophylline), too-frequent use of analgesics, ergotamine

Physical Factors

head trauma, invasive medical tests (adverse effect), exertion (e.g., sports, sexual orgasm), disorders of the neck

Hormonal Factors

onset of puberty in girls, menstruation, menopause, pregnancy delivery, birth-control pills, estrogen replacement therapy

(Source: "Migraine: The Complete Guide," American Council for Headache Education, copyright 1994)