



Yesterday we took a look at what migraine is, its symptoms and its causes and today we'll be looking at how you can take control of them without having to rely too heavily on painkillers and prescription medicines by making some pretty easy changes to your diet and the foods you eat.

It may seem a little far fetched to think that food could have any kind of influence on something as strong as a migraine but evidence suggests there are a number of things you can do to lessen the severity of migraines, reduce how often they happen, or even stop them completely, and of course an added benefit of these measures is that you'll be spared from many of the side-effects of over-the-counter and prescription medications.

You've probably heard many people say their migraines are triggered by certain foods and for some people the link between eating a food and then having to run to a darkened room to wait out the pain is very clear but for others, identifying foods which might cause a migraine can become an obsession of a lifetime. In actuality you may never really determine what foods trigger your migraine (if any) as only thirty percent of sufferers do and frantically obsessing over food in this way can actually bring about the very headache you're trying to avoid. Everybody's different and experiences migraine in a different way but some foods are more commonly incriminated in migraine and those foods are listed below. There is however an upside - and fortunately it's quite a big one as there are plenty of foods which can help prevent migraines from occurring in the first place.

Foods to Eat

Foods High in Magnesium

During a migraine attack levels of magnesium in the brain can fall dramatically and many migraine sufferers are deficient in this important mineral. Ensuring you eat a healthy, balanced diet can make a big difference to managing your migraines and increasing your consumption of magnesium-rich foods can help prevent attacks occurring and safeguard you against any deficiencies.

Good sources of magnesium include:

- Whole grains
- Spinach
- Broccoli



Wholemeal bread

- Bran flakes
- Red meat (make sure it's lean)
- Brazil nuts
- Almonds
- Cashews
- Hazel nuts
- Sunflower seeds
- Pine nuts
- Soya beans

Migraine & Food

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Symptoms of a magnesium deficiency include fatigue, weakness, poor appetite and impaired speech. Some people may also experience twitching limbs and tremors and an irregular heartbeat which can sometimes cause you to feel like you've "missed a breath".

Foods High in Vitamin B2: Riboflavin

Evidence suggests that vitamin B2 may be helpful in preventing migraine attacks from occurring and lessening the severity when they do so eating foods that are high in this vitamin may be helpful.

Good sources of vitamin B2 include:

- Marmite (go easy on this if you're sensitive to tyramine, see "foods to avoid")
- Liver and liver paté
- Bran flakes & oat bran flakes



Weetabix

- Nori seaweed
- Asparagus
- Okra
- Cottage cheese
- Milk
- Yoghurt
- Fish
- Eggs

A number of breakfast cereals are fortified with B vitamins too, but make sure you choose a low sugar variety.

Foods to Avoid

Foods High in Tyramine



Tyramine is a substance that occurs naturally in many foods, especially those which are aged or fermented. Not everyone who experiences migraines is sensitive to tyramine but avoiding foods which are particularly high in this substance may help prevent migraine attacks.

Foods and drinks high in tyramine include:

- Red wine
- Beer on tap
- Aged cheeses
- Cured and dried meats

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- Aged chicken liver
- Soy sauce
- Sauerkraut

Processed Foods & Artificial Sweeteners

Yet another reason to avoid processed foods is that some of them contain ingredients that have been found to cause headaches and trigger migraines. Most notably the flavour enhancer monosodium glutamate, or MSG, and artificial sweetener aspartame are commonly attributed to headaches and migraine.

MSG is commonly found in:

- Chinese food and cooking sauces
- Ready meals
- Flavoured crisps and snacks
- Fast food
- Processed meats

Aspartame (E951) is commonly found in:

- Diet and sugar-free drinks
- Fizzy drinks
- Diabetic foods
- Diet and low-calorie foods and drinks

A Note About Chocolate



Chocolate is consistently reported as a migraine trigger by sufferers and this certainly may be the case. However some headache specialists now believe some people may crave chocolate up to 24 hours before a migraine and that this craving is in fact the body's own way of trying to prevent an attack. Dark chocolate in particular contains moderate levels of caffeine, which is known to help alleviate headaches in low doses, and is a source of magnesium, the same mineral that becomes depleted during a migraine attack.

This is certainly an interesting theory which does appear to make sense but more research is needed to determine whether chocolate is a help or hindrance to migraine sufferers. Unless you strongly believe chocolate may be causing your migraines it's ok to keep eating it - in moderation of course. **NEXT TIME: Migraine & Nutritional Supplements We'll be looking at whether nutritional supplements really can help migraine sufferers and if there's any evidence to support the claims.**
