

Manage your migraine



Migraines are not just bad headaches, says Professor Anne MacGregor, a specialist in headaches and women's health (annemacgregor.com).

'If you have throbbing pains, usually on one side of the head, and are bothered by light, feel sick and find daily activities are affected, you have a migraine,' she adds. 'In fact just two out of three of these additional symptoms qualify.'

The cause isn't fully understood, though it can run in families, so there may be a genetic

component. Researchers think sufferers have a 'hyper-excitabile' brain that's particularly sensitive to certain stimuli. 'The two most common triggers are dehydration and low blood sugar,' says Professor MacGregor.

Other triggers include hormonal changes, worry, excitement, tiredness, neck or shoulder tension, alcohol, caffeine, the food additive tyramine, chocolate, cheese, bright or flickering lights, stuffy rooms, loud noises, some sleeping tablets, the Pill and HRT.

The majority of people can manage their symptoms with over-the-counter medication and the advice of a pharmacist, says Professor MacGregor.

Aspirin or ibuprofen usually work better than paracetamol or codeine but it's important to act quickly. There's a window of

opportunity during a migraine attack before the stomach stops working properly (gastric stasis) when any drugs you take won't be absorbed.

Taking medication with sweet, fizzy drinks, such as cola, can help

absorption – and boost blood sugar levels, which can aid recovery.

Drugs

Drugs called triptans are thought to work by reversing changes in the brain that may cause migraines. 'Sumatriptan is available without prescription from pharmacies but, while effective, there is a tendency for the migraine to return,' warns Professor MacGregor.

If these don't work, see your GP about stronger, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and anti-sickness medication. 'If nausea and sickness make it impossible to take tablets, talk to your GP about nasal sprays, suppositories and sumatriptan through an injectable device,' Professor MacGregor advises.

A preventative drug may also be considered

necessary, depending on the frequency of attacks and how disabling they are.

Other treatments

on prescription range from beta-blockers (to prevent blood vessels in the head dilating) to certain antidepressants (which keep the brain chemistry under control).

Taking too many painkillers can make migraines worse. If you take ordinary painkillers on more than 15 days a month, or triptans or codeine-related drugs on more than 10 days a month, your GP can refer you to a specialist migraine clinic to try alternative remedies, which have the advantage of having little or no side effects.

TMS

Transcranial magnetic stimulation was approved earlier this year by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice). It involves holding a small electrical device to your head that delivers magnetic pulses through your skin.

It's not clear exactly how it works but studies have shown that using it at the start of a migraine can reduce its severity.

Botox

Nice recommends Botox to prevent headaches in some adults with chronic migraine.

'Botulinum toxin is believed to inhibit the release of peripheral nociceptive neurotransmitters – the pain receptors or nerve endings,' says GP and cosmetic doctor Dr Dan Dhunna (drdandhunna.com).

'This is believed to have an effect on the central pain processing systems that generate migraines.'

Acupuncture

This can be used as a preventative treatment for tension-type

headaches and migraine. Nice suggests that GPs consider a course of up to 10 sessions of acupuncture over a five- to eight-week period.

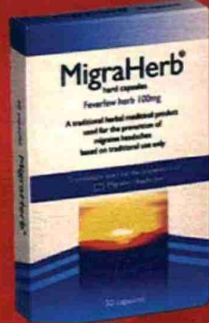
To find a registered acupuncturist, contact the [British Acupuncture Council](http://BritishAcupunctureCouncil.org.uk) (acupuncture.org.uk).

Self-help measures

- Keep a diary noting any details to find a pattern. The Migraine Trust has an online diary, which will help you record this information.
- Eat regularly, avoid sugary snacks and include slow-release carbohydrate foods in your diet.
- Drink plenty of water – two litres a day – but limit your intake of drinks containing caffeine and alcohol.
- Maintain a regular sleep pattern.
- Get plenty of fresh air and ensure your rooms are well ventilated.
- Avoid strong perfumes.
- Avoid bright, flashing or flickering lights and wear sunglasses in bright sunlight.



tried & tested treatments



Research shows feverfew can help prevent migraines. It's thought its active compound – parthenolide – helps relieve muscle spasms. Try **MigraHerb, £8.19 for 30 capsules** at Holland and Barrett.



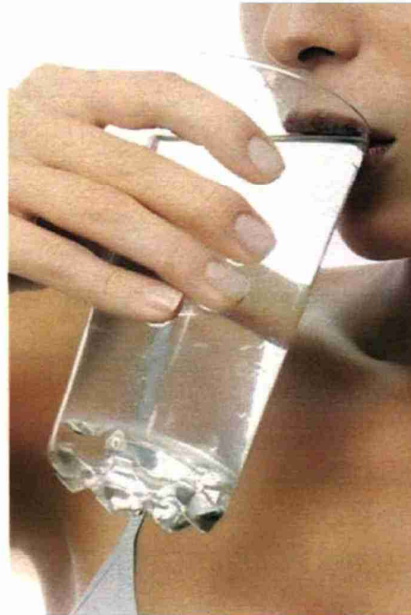
Co-enzyme Q10 is in every cell in your body and produces energy. It's shown to reduce migraine frequency. Try **Healthspan Co-enzyme Q10, £17.95 for 60 capsules** (healthspan.co.uk).



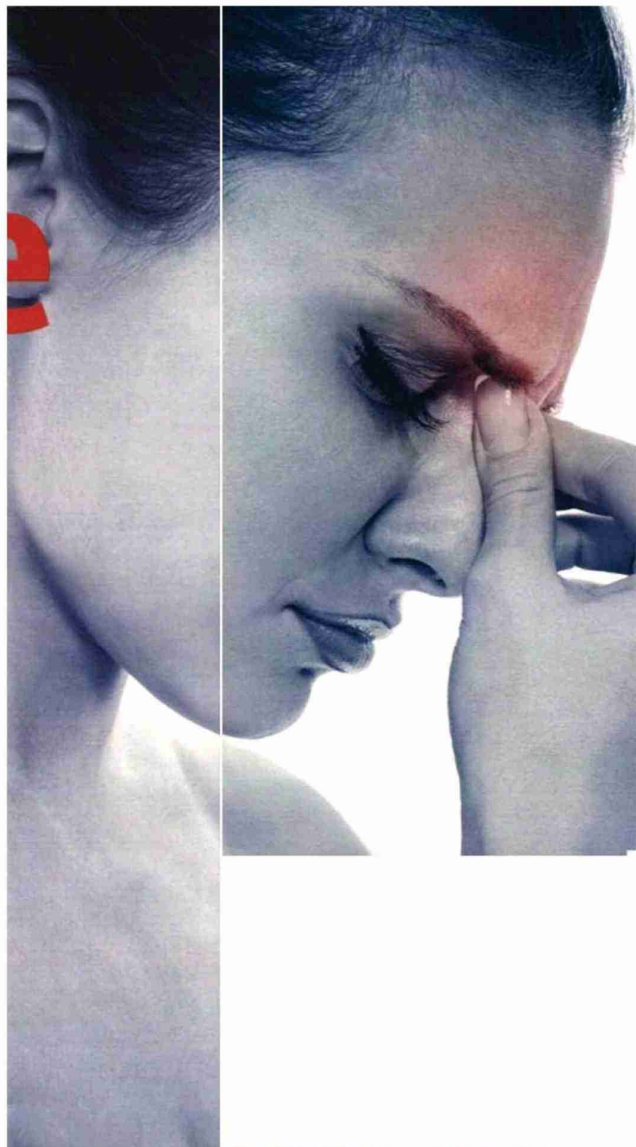
Cooling strips and sticks have active ingredients, such as leventholol, to create a cold sensation to relax tense muscles. Try **MigraStick, £5.99** at Holland & Barrett.



Magnesium is thought to be helpful for menstrual migraines. Try **Nature's Plus Dyno-Mins Magnesium, £14.95 for 90 capsules** at health stores.



40 **Bella**



● For further advice and support, contact Migraine Action (migraine.org.uk) or The Migraine Trust (migrainetrust.org).