

Foods and Factors That May Trigger Headaches

Certain foods, beverages, and environmental, hormonal, and lifestyle factors can trigger headaches. Identifying factors that trigger or aggravate headaches can help the patient with migraine avoid some attacks. The following foods and factors have been reported to trigger migraine headaches in some patients..

POSSIBLE HEADACHE TRIGGERS

■ Alcoholic Beverages

■ Caffeine and caffeine withdrawal

■ Certain Food Additives

■ **MSG (mono-sodium glutamate)** - Found in Chinese food, pepperoni, and in many processed foods including frozen dinners, canned and dried soups, prepared tomato and barbecue sauces, salad dressings and weight-loss powders.

■ **Aspartame (NutraSweet, Equal)** - Found in carbonated beverages, fruit juices, multivitamins, breath mints, chewing gum and iced tea.

■ **Tyramine** - Found in aged cheeses, Chianti wine, pickled herring, dried smoked fish, sour cream, yogurt, yeast extracts

■ **Sodium Nitrite** - Found in hot dogs, luncheon meats

■ Certain Foods including chocolate, citrus fruits, dairy products, onions, beans, nuts, and fatty foods

■ Environmental Changes

■ **Light** - Exposure to bright light, glare or flickering lights, including fluorescent lighting

■ **Strong odors** - Perfumes, paints, cleaning solutions, exhaust fumes, smoke

■ **Weather/Travel** - Weather changes, high humidity, high altitude

■ Lifestyle Factors

■ **Insufficient or excessive sleep**

■ **Going too long without eating (fasting)**

■ **Head injury**

■ **Stress, release from stress, anger, exhilaration, or emotional letdown**

■ **Smoking**

■ **Physical activity**

■ **Schedule changes**

■ Hormones

Hormonal factors commonly trigger headaches in women. Menopause, oral contraceptive pills, hormone replacement therapy, and pregnancy can make headaches worse, better, or they may have no effect.

■ Some prescription medications

■ Head or neck pain from another cause

USING THE HEADACHE TRIGGER TRACKER

1. Write your name and the week on the tracking form.
2. Review the Possible Triggers list with your doctor. Write down possible triggers you and your doctor want to track.
3. Each day, record time you consume possible trigger foods and beverages or are exposed to potential environmental or lifestyle triggers.
4. If you have a headache, write the time and day when it begins and ends.
5. Use one form for each week and return all the forms to your doctor at your next visit.
6. If you have questions, call your physician's office.