



Migraine?

Migraine is the world's most common neurological condition, affecting about 1 in 10 people. It is 3 times more common in women and is usually inherited. Attacks last from 4 to 72 hours. The World Health Organisation has identified migraine as the 19th leading cause of disability worldwide.

The most common symptoms are:

- Intense throbbing, one-sided headache
- Nausea, sometimes vomiting
- Sensitivity to light, noise and smells
- Migraine Aura is experienced by about 1 in 3 people before the headache, usually lasting for about 20-60 minutes. The most common symptoms are:
 - Visual disturbances - blind spots, flashing lights or zig-zag patterns
 - Pins and needles on one side starting in the fingers/arm, sometimes spreading to the face

The Migraine Trigger Factor Survey



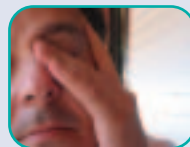
In 2005, the Headache/Migraine Clinic at Beaumont Hospital and the Migraine Association undertook a survey to identify the most common migraine trigger factors. Over 500 people were asked to identify things they thought triggered their migraine. The results from the survey are highlighted throughout this leaflet.

Trigger Factors

Trigger factors do not actually cause migraine but they can bring about individual attacks in people who are already susceptible to it.

It is thought that trigger factors are implicated in about 40% of attacks. Although there is no 'cure' for migraine, you may be able to reduce the number of attacks you get by identifying and avoiding your triggers.

Everyone's triggers are individual. Below is a list of some of the most common ones:



Hormonal Factors

In our survey, 55% of women said that menstruation triggered their migraine. The Oral Contraceptive was a trigger in 10% of cases and 7% said migraine was triggered by pregnancy.

Hormones are an important factor for many women's migraine.

- Migraine becomes more prevalent in females during puberty.
- Oestrogen fluctuations during menstruation can trigger migraine.
- Oestrogen in oral contraceptives and HRT can sometimes trigger migraine.
- Migraine typically improves during pregnancy when oestrogen levels are high, but for a small number of women, it gets worse.
- Migraine generally improves after menopause, but can get worse in the years leading up to it. In rare cases, migraine gets worse after menopause.

What you can do:

- If you have menstrually-related migraine and get 2 or more attacks a month, speak with your doctor – you may benefit from a preventative medication.
- If your attacks follow a regular pattern associated with menstruation, BE PREPARED. Have your medication to hand and try to schedule work commitments around the expected 'migraine days'.
- Reduce your exposure to other trigger factors around the time of menstruation e.g. stress.
- If you feel the Combined Oral Contraceptive is making your migraine worse, speak with your doctor about alternatives, such as the Progesterone Only Pill.

Sleep Related Factors

In our survey, 26% said that disturbed sleep triggered their migraine; 49% said that lack of sleep triggered their migraine and 34% said that oversleeping triggered their migraine.

Sleep can be a great way to get over a migraine attack, but it is also a trigger for some people. Too little, too much, irregular or disturbed sleep may trigger attacks for some people.

What you can do:

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day even at weekends.
- If you do shift work, light therapy and melatonin supplements may help alleviate the impact of irregular hours.

Stress

In our survey, 71% of respondents said that stress (at work, at home or in their personal lives) triggered their migraine. 65% said that withdrawal from stress triggered their migraine.

Prolonged stress and anxiety are regarded by many people as being factors that lower the migraine threshold. Even positive stressors such as the excitement of going on holiday can trigger attacks for some. Attacks can also occur in the 'let down' period after a stressful situation e.g. weekends or on holiday.

What you can do:

It may be impossible to eliminate stress entirely, but you can certainly control it.

- Build personal time into your day.
- Avoid negative stress coping measures such as alcohol, smoking and excessive caffeine.
- Learn relaxation techniques, yoga or biofeedback.
- Learn to say 'NO' and to delegate.
- Set realistic goals. Don't take on too much.
- Manage your time. Prioritise what needs to be done.
- If you usually get migraine when on holiday, try to take an extra day or two off work before you go away. A gradual let down period can reduce your chances of an attack.

Environmental Factors

In our survey, 43% of respondents said travel could trigger their migraine. The weather was implicated for 35% of people. Smoking or smoky atmospheres was blamed by 6% of people.

A myriad of environmental or external trigger factors can trigger migraine e.g.

- Bright or flickering lights. Fluorescent or strobe lighting
- Weather e.g. changes in pressure, heat, humidity, sun glare, strong winds
- High altitude
- Loud noise
- TV/ computer screens
- Strong smells, e.g. perfumes, paint, petrol etc.
- Travel e.g. jet lag, time zone changes. Also travel by car.
- Smoking or smoky atmospheres

What you can do:

- Many of these 'external' trigger factors are unavoidable, so try to minimise other triggers, as many people find that it takes a combination of events to bring about an attack.
- Use lighting that is as close to daylight as possible.
- If screen flicker is a trigger, make sure to take regular breaks. Use screens of 100Hz or above or plasma screens, which have no flicker at all.
- In bright conditions, or if you drive a lot, a good pair of sunglasses is a must. Wrap-arounds keep out more light than ordinary glasses, while high UV resistance and polarised lenses are other features that might help.

Activity Related Triggers

In our survey, 24% of respondents said that over exercising can trigger their migraine.

Regular mild exercise can help prevent migraine, but some people find that over-exertion can trigger attacks. Lack of exercise can be a trigger too.

What you can do:

- Exercise moderately but don't over-do it
- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

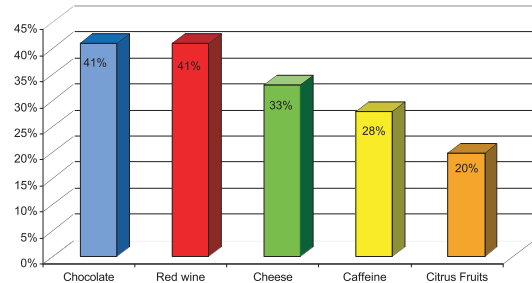


Dietary Factors

Although diet *may* be a very important factor, and is a good starting point in managing your triggers, international research has shown that only about 20% of migraine attacks are triggered by dietary factors.

Foods high in tyramine such as cheese and processed meats are believed to be among the worst migraine triggers. Caffeine, chocolate, citrus fruits, banana, alcohol, fizzy drinks, nuts, fatty foods and MSG are other common food-triggers.

Dietary Triggers reported in the 2005 Trigger Factor Survey



What you can do:

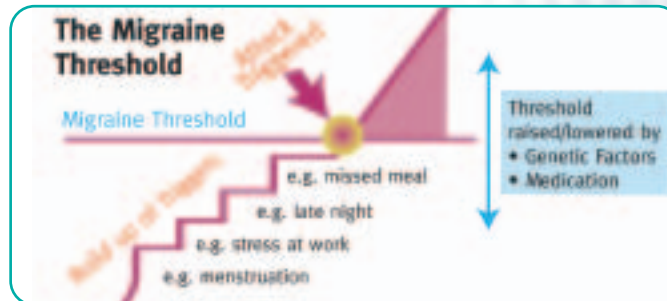
- Use a migraine diary to find dietary triggers.
- Look at all aspects of your diet, not just the most common trigger factors.
- Remember that when you eat is as important as what you eat. Keep regular patterns.
- Don't eliminate huge sections of your diet at once. This is unlikely to help you find your food-triggers and may lead to an unbalanced diet.
- Low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia) can trigger attacks, so try not to go longer than five waking hours without eating. Slow-release foods are also advisable e.g. cereals in the morning.

The Migraine Threshold

One theory relating to trigger factors suggests that migraine occurs because of hyperactivity in the nervous system. People with migraine are genetically programmed to be more vulnerable to certain irritating stimuli. When one, two, or several of these stimuli occur, the person's nervous system responds by activating the process in the brain that brings about a migraine attack.

According to this theory, everybody has a migraine threshold. Migraine-prone individuals simply have a lower threshold than others so it takes less to trigger an attack.

While some people may be sensitive to specific triggers, others may be vulnerable only when several triggers combine at once e.g. a deadline at work, together with long hours and a missed meal, may bring on an attack in someone who can usually tolerate any one of those triggers individually.



If this happens to you, then you may be able to limit your exposure to migraine by avoiding the 'avoidable' factors such as alcohol, food, late nights etc at times when the 'unavoidable' ones are present (hormonal changes, weather changes etc).

The Migraine Diary

Keeping a Migraine Diary accurately may point out patterns to your attacks over time. The diary should record details about your diet, the weather, your working patterns, travel and anything else that you suspect may be involved. Keep a diary for 6 – 8 attacks. Then look back over the 72 hours before each attack to see if a pattern emerges. Don't forget to look for combinations of triggers.

The diary will also help your GP when assessing the impact that migraine has on your life. It also helps you feel more in control, which in itself can contribute to an improvement in your migraine.

Call us at 1850 200 378 for a Diary or download one from www.migraine.ie.

Key Points

- Anything can be a trigger factor.
- Don't always blame food.
- Some people have no trigger factors.
- Keep a Migraine Diary.
- Look out for combinations of triggers.

The Migraine Association of Ireland

The Migraine Association of Ireland was formed in 1994 with 3 main goals:

- To provide information, support and reassurance to people with migraine.
- To raise awareness of migraine in the general population and among health professionals.
- To support migraine research and seek out better treatments for people with migraine.

Our services include:

- Call-save Helpline service – 1850 200 378
- Specialist Nurse Advice Line – 01 7979848
- *Brainstorm* quarterly newsletter
- *Migra-zine* e-mail newsletter
- Information leaflets and publications on all aspects of migraine
- Migraine Diary
- On-line resources at www.migraine.ie
- Information meetings
- Self-help groups and Workshops
- Public awareness campaigns – e.g. Migraine Action Week
- Outreach events
- Information services for Health professionals
- Campaigning for Specialist services i.e. Headache/Migraine clinics
- Support for Irish research

It costs just €15 a year to become a member, so join the Migraine Association today!

CALL-SAVE HELPLINE
1850 200 378

(10.00 – 4.00, Monday to Friday)

Advice Line: 01 797 9848

(Specialist Nurse 2.30pm – 4.30pm, Monday – Thursday)

Phone: 01 806 4121 **Fax:** 01 806 4122

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MIGRAINE ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND



Migraine Trigger Factors



What you can do