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A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF MIGRAINE

Which foods help prevent migraines?



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As migraines can be so debilitating, it can be beneficial to identify and avoid potential triggers. For some people, migraine triggers can include specific foods or types of food.

Conversely, some foods may reduce the frequency of [migraine](#) headaches or lessen their symptoms. While there is no definitive “migraine diet,” people may be able to reduce their migraines by monitoring what they eat.

In this article, we look at some of the foods that may prevent, trigger, or relieve migraines.

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Foods to eat during a migraine attack



Caffeine is a crystalline substance that could help with treating migraines. Some medical companies add powdered caffeine to over-the-counter (OTC) headache treatments.

However, there is a fine line between the amount of caffeine that could reduce migraine headaches and too much caffeine, which could trigger withdrawal headache symptoms.

The [American Migraine Foundation](#) recommend that people who get migraines limit their daily intake of caffeine to 200 milligrams (mg). However, it is worth noting that regularly consuming more than 100 mg of caffeine a day is a risk factor for headaches.

Eating bland foods from the lists of approved foods below can help minimize nausea during a migraine attack. Examples of these foods include white bread, saltine crackers, and pears.

What foods can help prevent migraines?

Eating a healthful diet can help prevent migraines. A healthful diet should consist of fresh foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.

Fresh foods are less likely to have added food preservatives, such as monosodium glutamate (MSG). Preservatives can trigger migraines in some people, so avoiding foods that contain them can help.

The [Association of Migraine Disorders](#) have created a list of “migraine safe foods” to guide a person’s food choices. These foods generally do not contain preservatives, yeasts, flavorings, and other substances that are potential migraine triggers, such as nitrites and phenylalanine.

Below, we look at which foods to eat and avoid within a range of food groups:

Bread, grains, and cereals

Foods to eat:

- most cereals, except for those containing nuts, dried fruits, or aspartame
- plain or sesame seed bagels
- quick bread, such as pumpernickel or zucchini bread
- most plain pretzels and potato chips
- unflavored crackers, such as saltines or Club crackers
- white, wheat, rye, or pumpernickel bread from a store

Foods to avoid:

- flavored crackers, such as cheddar cheese crackers
- fresh bread that is homemade or from a grocer’s bakery
- pizza, as it is also a fresh bread
- highly flavored or seasoned chips
- soft pretzels

Meats, nuts, and seeds

Foods to eat:

- fresh beef, chicken, fish, lamb, pork, [turkey](#), or veal
- poppy seeds

- pumpkin seeds
- sesame seeds
- sunflower seeds without natural flavors

Foods to avoid:

- beef and chicken livers
- breaded meats
- marinated meats
- flavored popcorn
- nut butters

Salad dressings and sauces

Foods to eat:

- homemade dips that use fresh ingredients without artificial flavorings
- homemade ranch dressings
- oil and distilled white vinegar salad dressings

Foods to avoid:

- bottled salad dressings
- pre-packaged dips, such as salsa, alfredo sauce, or mustard dips

Many bottled salad dressings and pre-packaged dips contain additives and preservatives that can trigger migraines. Additives to avoid include MSG, nitrites, and aspartame.

Aged cheese and red wine vinegar may also contribute to migraines, so it is best to limit their consumption.

Vegetables and fruits

Foods to eat:

- fresh fruits
- fresh vegetables

- preservative-free bagged lettuce

Examples of vegetables to eat include peppers, zucchini, fresh potatoes, carrots, and cauliflower.

Foods to avoid:

- boxed instant mashed potatoes
- dried fruits containing sulfite preservatives
- citrus fruits
- lima beans
- navy beans
- [onions](#)
- sauerkraut

Some fruits may also contain pollens or other compounds, and these can cause a histamine release that could trigger a migraine. Examples include [bananas](#), oranges, grapefruits, raspberries, and plums.

Other prevention tips

Eating several small meals throughout the day can also help maintain steady blood sugar levels and prevent hunger, which can trigger migraines in some people.

A nutritious approach to the diet can help a person maintain a healthy weight too. According to the [American Migraine Foundation](#), being overweight can make migraines more likely or worsen their symptoms.

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What foods can trigger migraines?



The foods that trigger migraines will vary from person to person, and some individuals may not have any food-related migraine triggers.

However, some foods that commonly trigger migraines include:

- aged cheeses
- alcohol, particularly beer and red wine
- chocolate
- cured meats
- food preservatives, such as nitrates, nitrites, MSG, and artificial sweeteners
- smoked fish
- yeast extract

Not eating anything at all can also lead to an increased incidence of migraines. For some people, prolonged hunger and not eating enough are known [headache](#) triggers. This may be due to a link between low blood sugar levels and worsening migraine headaches.

Tips to identify trigger foods

Some doctors may recommend that people with migraines keep a food journal to track what they eat and any headache symptoms that they experience.

It is worth noting that some people may have an immediate reaction to a food, while others may not react until 24 hours after eating it.



see if migraines still occur. For example, a person may decide to avoid all products that contain red wine for a week, including red wine vinegar and the wine itself.

This approach can ensure that people do not remove foods from their diet unnecessarily.

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Additional migraine triggers

Doctors have identified five main trigger categories for migraines, one of which is different food types. The other four categories are:

- **Changes in the environment.** Changes in atmospheric pressure, the season, and even storms may trigger migraines.
- **Hormones.** Changes in hormone levels that occur due to the menstrual cycle can trigger migraines, as can some hormonal changes during pregnancy.
- **Sensory stimulation.** Bright lights, certain smells, smoke, and excessive and repetitive noises can all trigger migraines in some people.

- **Stress.** [Stress](#), intensive exercise, illness, or unusual sleep habits may trigger migraines.

Sometimes, a combination of migraine triggers can lead to a migraine headache. For example, a person could be very stressed, miss a meal, and reduce their hours of sleep.

Additional migraine treatment options



Making dietary changes is not the only option for treating migraines.

Some migraine-specific OTC medications are available. These often combine acetaminophen, [aspirin](#), and caffeine.

Anyone who needs to take these medications several times a week to manage their symptoms is likely to require other prescription treatments to reduce their migraines.

Other treatment approaches may include:

- Medications that can reduce the excessive nerve signaling that contributes to migraines, such as topiramate (Topamax). Onabotulinum toxin A ([BOTOX](#)) injections, which may help reduce the occurrence and severity of migraines.

- Occipital nerve stimulation (ONS), an approach that doctors usually reserve for the most severe, recurrent headaches.

ONS involves inserting special devices called leads into the tissue in the back of the head where the occipital nerves transmit. The leads send signals to these nerves to try to interrupt transmissions that might lead to migraine headaches.

Some natural approaches, such as using peppermint, [ginger](#), and the herb feverfew, [may also relieve](#) migraine symptoms.

A doctor can discuss these treatment options and others with a person to help them manage their migraine headaches.

Outlook

Diet can play a role in preventing, triggering, and relieving migraines. However, migraines vary from person to person, so a type of food that is beneficial for one person may not be suitable for another.

According to the Association of Migraine Disorders, [fewer than 30 percent](#) of people who get migraines have identified food-related triggers. In spite of this, many people try keeping food journals or doing elimination diets in an attempt to identify potential triggers.

In cases that do involve the diet, people can avoid foods known to trigger headaches to help control pain and reduce the frequency or severity of their migraines. It is best to work with a doctor and a registered dietitian to determine an effective diet and migraine prevention plan.

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Last medically reviewed on September 24, 2018

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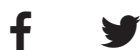
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