

Headache Hygiene—What is it?

Headache hygiene is the practice of taking care of yourself in a way that will reduce the likelihood and intensity of headaches. Simple things like changes to a normal routine can lead to a severely disabling migraine attack. Understanding how lifestyle affects the severity and frequency of attacks can be a large part of successful migraine prevention.

1. Lifestyle Changes

Adopting good habits will prevent headaches over time, but the change will not be immediate so stick with it. For example:

1. Maintain regular sleep patterns. Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day, even on weekends. Plan your assignments ahead so you don't have to stay up late cramming for tests and finishing papers.
2. Exercise for at least 30 minutes three times a week. Join a team or walk with a friend.
3. Eat meals at the same time each day, do not skip meals, and eat a good, healthful breakfast.
4. Drink plenty of water.
5. Reduce stress. Limit stress by avoiding conflicts and resolving disputes calmly. When you feel overwhelmed ask for help. When you feel stressed take a minute for yourself - take slow, deep breaths and think about something that makes you happy.
6. Avoid known triggers (see table on Common Triggers).
7. Maintain the medication treatment plan designed by you and your physician. Early intervention may help prevent the migraine from progressing into a severe, disabling attack.
 - a. If you take a medicine to prevent headaches, keep it in a place where you will remember it - at the breakfast table, for example.
 - b. Keep your rescue medicine (medicine you take when you get a headache) with you so that you can take it at the first sign of a headache. If you are not allowed to carry medicine at school make sure you have a few doses at the nurse's office.
 - c. Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, do not take rescue medicine more than two days per week. If your headaches are becoming more frequent or more severe, see your doctor again.

2. Trigger avoidance

Triggers are specific factors that may increase your risk of having a migraine attack. The migraine sufferer has inherited a sensitive nervous system that under certain circumstances, can lead to migraine. Triggers do not "cause" migraine. Instead, they are thought to activate processes that cause migraine in people who are prone to the condition. By keeping a headache diary, you will be able to identify some triggers for your particular headaches.

Triggers are different for each person. Once you have identified triggers, it will be easier for you to avoid them and reduce your chances of having a migraine attack.

Common Triggers

Categories	Triggers	Examples
Dietary	Skipping meals/fasting Food Items	Chemicals [eg. MSG (monosodium glutamate), yeast extract] Caffeine withdrawal [missing your morning coffee] Processed meats (containing nitrates) [eg. hot dogs] Alcohol/red wine
Sleep	Change in sleep patterns	Napping Oversleeping Too little sleep Going to bed or getting up at inconsistent times
Environmental	Weather changes	Rain Extreme heat
	Bright lights	Sun without eye shades Flashing lights or screens
	Odors	Perfumes Cleaners
Hormonal	Estrogen level changes	Menstruation Birth control pills
Stress	School	Tests, Exams Assignment Deadlines
	Home	Disagreements with parents or siblings
	Friends/Peers	Breakups Being bullied or picked on
Stress Letdown	Discontinuation of work	Weekends / vacations
Physical	Injuries	Head injury playing a sport
	Over-exertion	Exercising in the heat