

# Migraine

## Reducing attacks by adopting a healthy lifestyle



There is no miracle cure against migraines, but there are several ways of better controlling them, starting with a healthy lifestyle. Find out what helps to reduce attacks and what may trigger them.

### What are the links between my lifestyle and my migraines?

An irregular and changing lifestyle can be a source of stress for the nervous system. Some people are more sensitive to it than others. This could be enough to trigger migraine attacks or make them worse. This is why having a **routine** is a key element to better managing migraines. The table below shows what tends to reduce migraine attacks.

#### Healthy habits to reduce migraines

Sleep	Sleep from seven to eight hours a night. Try to go to bed at the same time every night when possible. Avoid watching television and any other display screens while in bed. Avoid napping.
Diet	Eat three meals a day at regular hours. Try not to have a late breakfast. Drink sufficient amounts of water. Prepare healthy snacks.
 Caffeine	Have drinks containing caffeine, such as coffee, energy drinks, tea and chocolate, before 3:00 p.m. Limit your coffee intake to one or two per day. Certain people may want to consider stopping their coffee intake altogether.
Relaxation and stress management	Set aside some relaxation time once a day. Practice slow breathing, meditation or other relaxation techniques. When needed, use biofeedback, which allow you to monitor your level of relaxation using a device that is attached to the body (i.e. to measure the tension in your muscles or your heart activity).
 Physical exercise	Do physical exercise with moderate shortness of breath for 30 minutes 3 times a week (i.e. walking or cycling). Drink a lot of water. Do not exercise when you are hungry. Adapt exercise to your abilities.

**Is there a link between weight and migraines?** It's possible. Migraines and chronic headaches are three times more prevalent in people who are over their healthy body weight. Healthy body weight is determined by the body mass index (BMI). You can establish this with your doctor.



## What effects can these changes have on my migraines?

If you make significant lifestyle changes, in just a few weeks you may notice that the frequency and severity of your migraines has decreased.

The migraine remains a neurological disorder. It may necessitate treatment even though you have a healthy lifestyle.

## What are the most common migraine triggers?

To better control migraines, it is important to know what can trigger them. Try to find what triggers your migraines. Once you know what your triggers are, you can try to avoid them whenever possible. A word of advice: aim to find a balance not a perfect lifestyle! Otherwise, you will always have the feeling that you are depriving yourself.



## The most common triggers

### Physical activity

- > Physical exercise that is too strenuous or that lacks sufficient recovery time. Dehydration during exercise. Excessive or repeated neck movements. Sexual activity.

### Sleep

- > Lack of sleep. Rising from bed later than usual. Jetlag.

### Diet

- > Skipping a meal. Drinking alcohol or wine containing sulfites. Eating certain foods such as: cold cuts, aged cheeses, nuts or foods containing aspartame (i.e. yogurts, "diet" soft drinks) or monosodium glutamate (i.e. Chinese food).



### Emotions and stress

- > Disease, anxiety, depression, confrontation, guilt, grieving, etc. Even joyous events (an anniversary, a wedding, etc.) can trigger an attack.

### Environment

- > Heat. Humidity. Poor air quality. Changes in atmospheric pressure.

### Hormonal changes

- > Menstruation. Changing oral contraceptive. The time around menopause is often more difficult. An improvement is often noted during pregnancy (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> trimesters).

### Stimulation of the senses

> Intense light. Loud noises. Strong smells.

### Medications

> Several medications can trigger a migraine. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist.



### REMEMBER

**You can do something about your migraines!**

How?

By focussing on 3 things:

- your lifestyle
- a treatment against attacks
- a preventive treatment, if needed



## NOTEPAD



### Questions




### Resource people and contacts




### USEFUL RESOURCES

Migraine Canada:

> [migrainecanada.org](http://migrainecanada.org)

Migraine Québec:

> [migrainequebec.com](http://migrainequebec.com)

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available (in French only). Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site [chumontreal.qc.ca/votresante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/votresante)

*This document was prepared in collaboration with Migraine Québec.*

*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal [chumontreal.qc.ca](http://chumontreal.qc.ca)

