



## The Headache Center Migraine Diet

(Thanks to Dr. Jason Rosenberg and the Johns Hopkins Headache Center for this compilation, which we have modified from our experience.)

Food may play a significant role in the frequency of migraine. Although some migraine patients find that eating certain foods will provoke symptoms every single time, the effect of diet may be less obvious. In general, the more “trigger” foods you consume, the more symptoms you may have. The hope is that by avoiding these possible triggers, the better off you will be. Eating regularly timed meals, avoiding hunger, avoiding dehydration, and avoiding skipping meals is probably more important than the specific foods you do or do not eat. Try following this list as strictly as possible for at least two months. If it helps, you may gradually add back your favorite foods one at a time, keeping track of your headaches as you do so.

Category	Foods to Avoid, Reduce, or Limit	Foods that are OK
<b>Caffeine</b>	No more than 2 servings / day. Do not vary the amount or timing from day to day. Coffee, tea, colas, Mountain Dew, Sunkist, certain medications (Anacin, Excedrin)	Decaffeinated coffee, herbal or green tea, caffeine-free sodas, fruit juice (see below)
<b>Snacks / Desserts</b>	<b>Chocolate, nuts</b> (peanuts, especially), <b>peanut butter</b> , seeds	Fruits listed below, sherbet, ice cream, cakes, pudding, Jello, sugar, jam, jelly, honey, hard candy, cookies made w/o chocolate or nuts
<b>Alcohol</b>	Avoid all, especially: ales, Burgundy, chianti, malted <b>beers, red wine</b> , sherry, vermouth. Note: some medications contain alcohol (Nyquil)	Non-alcoholic beverages
<b>Dairy</b>	<b>Aged cheeses:</b> Brie, blue, boursault, brick, Camembert, cheddar, Emmentaler, gouda, mozzarella, Parmesan, Provolone, Romano, Roquefort, stilton, Swiss, etc. Buttermilk, chocolate milk, sour cream Eggs and <b>yogurt</b> should be limited to 2-3 times per week	Other cheeses: American, cottage, cream cheese, farmer, ricotta, Velveeta.  Milk, Egg substitute
<b>Cereals &amp; Grains</b>	Fresh breads and <b>yeast products</b> , fresh bagels, fresh doughnuts, yeast extracts, brewer’s yeast, sourdough (*freezing bread may inactivate yeast)	Commercial breads (white, wheat, rye, multi-grain, Italian), English Muffins, crackers, rye, toast, bagels, potatoes, rice, spaghetti, noodles, hot or dried cereals, oatmeal
<b>Meats</b>	Aged, canned, cured, or <b>processed meats</b> (bologna, pepperoni, salami, other pre-packaged deli meats), pickled meats or fish, salted or dried meats or poultry, hot dogs, sausages, jerky	Fresh / unprocessed meats, poultry, fish, lamb, pork, veal, lamb, tuna
<b>MSG (monosodium glutamate)</b>	Avoid <b>glutamate</b> in all its multiple forms: MSG, “natural flavoring,” “flavor enhancer,” etc. Soy sauce, foods containing “hydrolyzed protein products” or “autolyzed yeast”, canned soups, bouillon cubes, Accent, meat tenderizers, seasoned salts. Pickled, preserved or marinated foods	Salt and other spices, butter, margarine, cooking oil, white vinegar, salad dressing (small amounts)
<b>Sweeteners</b>	Aspartame (Equal, Nutrasweet) (somewhat controversial)	Sucrose (sugar), high fructose corn syrup, sucralose (Splenda), saccharin (Sweet ’n Low)
<b>Vegetables</b>	Pole or broad beans, lima beans, Italian beans, lentils, snow peas, fava beans, Navy beans, pinto beans, pea pods, sauerkraut, garbanzo beans, <b>onions, olives</b> , pickles	Asparagus, beets, broccoli, carrots, corn, lettuce, pumpkins, spinach, squash, string beans, tomatoes— all those not listed
<b>Fruit</b>	<b>Avocados</b> , figs, papaya, passion fruit, raisins, red plums. Limit <b>bananas</b> and <b>citrus fruit</b> & juice (orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit, tangerines) to ½ cup per day	Apples, berries, peaches, pears, prunes, fruit cocktail
<b>Mixed Dishes</b>	Beef stroganoff, cheese blintzes, frozen meals / TV diners, lasagna, macaroni and cheese, pizza	

Note that tyramine, nitrites, nitrates, and MSG are found in many foods and may be difficult to avoid. Learn to read labels.

While there are few consistent scientific studies of the effect of food on headaches, there is a general consensus about which foods may be important to avoid. The above list is drawn from various sources including the National Headache Foundation, journal articles, websites and books (such as David Buchholz’s *Heal Your Headache: The 1-2-3 Program for Taking Charge of Your Pain*). © 2006 Jason Rosenberg, MD



The Headache Center  
**Vitamins and Dietary Supplements**

Certain vitamins and food supplements may provide a benefit in terms of headache prevention. Many unsubstantiated claims can be found on the internet and at health food stores. The best evidence exists for the agents below (published peer reviewed, randomized controlled trials, albeit small ones in some cases). Side effects are typically mild.

- B2/Riboflavin – up to 400mg / day
- Magnesium – up to 400mg 2x / day (diarrhea possible)
- Coenzyme Q<sub>10</sub> – up to 100mg 3x / day (expensive)

Note: There are a few companies that package more than one of the above vitamins / supplements into a single pill for convenience. One such product is “Migravent”, info. available at <http://www.migravent.com>.; another is “MigreLief”, info. available at <http://www.migrelief.com>.

- Melatonin – There is some weaker evidence that melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate sleep, may help headaches if 3–6 mg is taken an hour or so before bedtime. Significant side effects are rare. Probably most useful in treating cluster headaches.

The following are used in Europe more commonly, but are less regulated or reliable in the US:

- Butterburr (*Petasites hybridus*) extract, Petadolex brand (pyrrolizidine alkaloid free), 50–75mg twice a day with food (expensive)
- Feverfew (*Parthenium integrifolium*) 50mg+ per day (inexpensive)

We do not specifically endorse any brand name item, nor do we have any financial interest in any of these products.