

# Health Mart Pharmacist Column

## Migraine Treatment



Are you one of the more than 28 million Americans who suffer from migraines? If so, you may be all too familiar with a debilitating headache that regularly robs you of your quality of life. Migraines actually cost the country \$50 billion in lost productivity, absenteeism, and medical expenses each year.

With a throbbing, often one-sided character, migraines are also many times accompanied or preceded by other symptoms, such as nausea, blind spots, or sensitivity to light and sound. It's not uncommon for migraines to last hours or even days, forcing the sufferer to seek solace in a quiet room with doors closed, lights off, and covers pulled up.

What could wreak such havoc? It's not your run-of-the-mill headache, that's for sure. Though half the people with migraines go undiagnosed, they are a serious, genetically based disorder, not just a symptom. In fact, if you have migraines, your children have a 50% chance of having migraines, too. And, according to a report in the British Medical Journal, migraineurs—as migraine sufferers are sometimes called—are more than twice as likely to suffer from stroke.



The link to stroke is still unclear, but one intriguing area of recent research may partly explain it. It has to do with an opening in the heart, called patent foramen ovale. This opening, which is normal in fetuses, never closes in about a quarter of the U.S. population. Closing it can help prevent strokes. But several studies have also shown it can cure migraines or lessen their severity.

Many people find that certain things can trigger their migraines. This could be anything from changes in air pressure or chemical fumes to red wine, processed meats, or monosodium glutamate (MSG). Keeping a headache diary to identify and eliminate your unique triggers can make a big difference in the frequency and severity of your headaches. However, some triggers are more difficult to get rid of. For example, women—who are three times more likely to have migraines than men—may find that changing estrogen levels trigger their migraines.

If you suffer from migraines, one of the best things you can do is establish a relationship with a pharmacist who is knowledgeable about migraine treatment. Ask which new migraine drugs are promising or whether a brand name medication works better than a generic. Also, work with your doctor to tailor treatment to your situation, taking into account the frequency and severity of your headaches. And, know that overuse of medications can cause rebound headaches or other problems. Your persistence about matters like these may greatly improve your headaches.

Although preventive medications may not completely eliminate migraines, they may work over time by preventing blood vessels from swelling. Heart medications, such as beta blockers and calcium channel blockers

are two common choices. Some antidepressants may help by changing levels of brain chemicals. Anti-seizure drugs are another class of preventive medications that work for unknown reasons.

A wide variety of medications can relieve pain or reduce the severity or duration of an attack. Medications taken at the first sign of migraine, such as flashes of light or tingling sensations, may help “nip it in the bud.” These range from simple analgesics for mild pain to prescription nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), triptans, and ergots.

Don't overlook non-drug methods of migraine management. Two that have been shown to be helpful are acupuncture and biofeedback. Acupuncture involves the placement of thin, disposable needles in the body. Biofeedback uses equipment to monitor and control physical responses. In addition, herbs such as feverfew and butterbur have shown promise for alleviating migraines.



If you have any questions please feel free to contact me @ 873-3244 or [mcglynnrx@tds.net](mailto:mcglynnrx@tds.net)

Thanks,  
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