7 Reasons You Might Get Migraines

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

Why Do I Have a Migraine? Here's the Answer

As a woman in her mid-30s, I have been suffering from migraines for well over half my life. I can remember when I was diagnosed at 12 years old. I had hoped that 20 plus years later, I would see a cure.

Well, friends – there still is no cure. However, we know quite a bit more about why we have migraines than we used to! So, if you have ever asked yourself, “why do I have a migraine?” be sure to read on for more information.

What Are Migraines?

Migraines are more than just a headache; migraines are recurrent headaches. They cause intense headaches that can be described “throbbing” or “pulsating.” Often, they occur with other symptoms such as photosensitivity (sensitivity to light) and phonosensitivity (sensitivity to sound), as well as nausea and vomiting.

Migraines can occur in anyone, though they occur more frequently in women and those who have a family history of migraines. They also are more likely to occur in people who have other neurological conditions, such as epilepsy, sleep disorders and psychological disorders, such as anxiety, depression and bipolar.

Common Reasons for Migraines

According to FamilyDoctor.org, researchers are not sure what exactly causes migraines. There are various theories:

- **Serotonin:** Serotonin plays a role in how our blood flows through our vessels; when serotonin levels are high, blood vessels constrict. When serotonin levels are low, blood vessels dilate. Swelling can cause a myriad of problems, such as migraines.
- **Electrical activity:** Our body is a flurry of electrical activity due to our nervous systems. One theory is that migraines “. . . go along with a spreading pattern of electrical activity in the brain.”
- **Genetics:** According to the American Migraine Foundation, if one of your parents suffers from migraines, there is a 50% chance that you will also suffer from migraines. That increases to 75% if both of your parents suffer from migraines.

Even though we do not know the specific cause of migraines, we do know that there are various triggers. Everyone who experiences migraines is different; their triggers are not the same as someone else’s.

Stress

According to the American Migraine Foundation, 70% of people with migraine identify it as a trigger, making it the most common.

There are certainly inevitable stressors that we cannot fix. For example, we cannot stop the car from breaking down. However, doing things like meditation and exercising on a regular basis can reduce stress levels.

Sleep

Research indicates that almost half of all migraines occur between 4:00 AM and 9:00 AM. This increases the risk of developing a sleep disorder. Why? When you are not sleeping adequately, you are more likely to develop migraines.

It is recommended to go to bed at the same time every night and try to sleep for seven to eight hours. It is also recommended to avoid using electronics in the bedroom.

Weather

Weather variabilities are something that we cannot control but can lead to a migraine. For example, barometric pressure changes, extreme heat and humidity can all be triggers.

If you have weather triggers, try to avoid them as best you can. For example, if high heat is not your friend, stay indoors during the hottest part of the day and use air conditioning if possible.

Food

The American Migraine Foundation notes that most people with migraine cannot identify specific food triggers. However, the most reported triggers are alcohol (33%) and chocolate (22%).

Common identified triggers:

- Alcohol
- Sweeteners such as aspartame
- Foods containing tyramine, such as beans
- Caffeine
- Processed meats, such as ham, bacon and salami
- Foods containing MSG, such as soup
- Cheese and yogurt

When attempting an elimination diet, a food should be eliminated for four weeks before reinitiating into your diet.

Self-Care for Migraines

Aside from avoiding foods that trigger your migraines and getting plenty of sleep, what else can you do to prevent migraines? You can:

- **Turn down the lights:** Bright lights can exacerbate head pain. Bonus if you can get some sleep!
- **Experiment with different temperatures:** Depending on how I am feeling, I like a hot pack on my shoulders or an ice pack on my head. Ice packs can have a numbing effect on sore heads, while warm compresses can sooth sore muscles. Perhaps you are a tub person; if so, draw a warm bath and relax.
- **Eat on a schedule:** Try to eat at the same time each day, without skipping meals. This keeps your blood sugar levels stable.
- **Breathe:** If you are stressed, take a few minutes to breathe. Whether you simply spend a moment counting to 10 or you listen to a guided meditation, focusing on your breath can help you relax.
- **Keep track:** Keep a log of your migraines so that you can identify triggers. Whether you track in a notebook or use one of the various apps available, identifying patterns can be extremely helpful.

Final Notes

For those asking, “why do I have a migraine?” there could be many reasons for why you are experiencing one. It might be recent weather changes, genetics, or something you ate. Keeping track of when you experience migraines can help narrow down the trigger.

Be sure to always speak with your doctor to get a proper diagnosis and help determine what exactly is causing your migraines. Then, you will be able to better treat them and manage symptoms.