

The Headache Series

by Dr. Martha Rich

INTRODUCTION

It's hard to find an adult who's never experienced a headache before. Frequent headaches affect nearly 50 million Americans each year, and while most of those headaches do not pose serious health risks, they can have a serious impact on our ability to function well. For a very select group of people, recurring headaches are a true neurological disorder that can only be controlled or alleviated with prescription medication. But for most of us, headaches are often caused or exacerbated by a combination of factors that are well within our control.

In fact, 90% of all headaches diagnosed are muscular in nature and can be prevented. Advertisers may tell us to take Ibuprofen, Aleve, or Excedrin, and physicians may prescribe even stronger medications, but medication is not a cure for the common headache, it's a band aid. Taken in excess, pain medication is extremely dangerous to your health. And rebound headaches, or headaches that are actually caused by the medication itself, are a common experience for many people who find themselves turning to over-the-counter or prescription medication for pain relief more than a few times a month.

Remember, frequent headaches and other types of body pain are not an indication that your body is suffering from a lack of pain medication. Pain is your body's way of communicating with you. Pressing the mute button with the regular use of pain relievers robs you of the chance to hear your body's message and begin to heal yourself. Helping you hear this message in order to identify, prevent, and even eliminate your common headache triggers without the use of medication is what this series is all about. Each article explores a single common cause of head pain and offers preventive exercises, additional resources, and natural solutions for pain relief. A headache diary is also included so that you can begin to track and discover the triggers that apply specifically to your body chemistry and lifestyle habits.

Your head was not meant to ache, and changing a few simple habits can make a world of difference for most people. Use the menu below to read more about the headache triggers you suspect may apply to you the most. If you are unsure where to begin, we suggest starting with the Headache Diary. A week or two of tracking your diet, physical activity, stress levels, and other factors can often be a revelation for many patients. Once you have identified a few key areas to focus on, refer back to the appropriate sections in the Headache Series for more information. You may also choose to bring your Headache Diary sheets to your medical provider if you are having trouble finding a pattern.

An Important Note About Head Pain

The information provided in this series is designed to help you identify and improve as many of the everyday conditions that may be contributing to your headaches as possible. Exercises and other recommendations presented here should not cause or increase pain, and are not intended as a substitute for a medical diagnosis or necessary medical treatment.

NOTE: If you are experiencing significant, unrelenting head pain, please consult your doctor or visit an Emergency Room as soon as possible in order to rule out any neurological conditions that could pose more serious risks to your health.