



If you've had one before, you know it can suck the fun out of any day. A bright light or a loud noise may put you down for several hours with a pounding skull and pure frustration. Migraines are more common than most think, and by familiarizing yourself with what triggers a migraine and how to prevent one, you can start to take down the migraine instead of it taking down you.

Every year, around 28 million Americans are affected by migraines, and it's become the most common neurological disorder that is treated by neurologists. Migraines are a condition that involve intense, throbbing pain on one side of the head that often becomes worse with movement and can involve nausea, vomiting and extreme sensitivity to light and sound, according to Dr. Shruti Badhwar, neurologist with Phoenix Neurology and Sleep Medicine.

Many may confuse a migraine and a headache, but there are some key ways to telling them apart. The difference between a headache and a migraine is that a headache may just have pulsing or throbbing inside one's head, and, while a migraine can last up to several days, headaches usually don't.

Unfortunately migraines tend to start in the teenage years and can even begin sooner than that. Badhwar notes that females are three times more likely to get migraines than boys and are usually passed from mother to daughter since a migraine can be hereditary. Here is a list of factors that can trigger migraines, courtesy of Dr. Badhwar:

- Lack of or too much sleep
- Skipped meals
- Bright lights, loud noises, or strong odors
- Hormone changes during the menstrual cycle
- Stress and anxiety, or relaxation after stress
- Weather changes
- Alcohol (often red wine)
- Caffeine (too much or withdrawal)
- Foods that contain nitrates, like hot dogs and lunch meats
- Foods containing MSG (monosodium glutamate), a flavor enhancer found in fast foods, broths, spices
- Foods containing tyramine, like aged cheeses, soy products, fava beans, hard sausages, smoked fish
- Aspartame (NutraSweet and Equal)

While that may seem like an extensive list, Dr. Badhwar suggests to keeping a "migraine diary" in order to pinpoint the factor that is causing the migraines. By writing down the time that the migraine happened, what you ate or drank 24 hours prior to the attack as well as where you were and what you were doing, you may be able to hone in on one particular thing that is triggering the migraines.

There are plenty of ways to effectively treat migraines and some of the best ways aren't necessarily painkillers. "One of the biggest mistakes people make is assuming that no other treatment beside medication can relieve migraines," Badhwar says. "Painkillers are only used to treat symptoms and will never result in long term help." In fact, two-thirds of all chronic migraine sufferers will experience headaches as a result of taking too many painkillers. A more natural treatment is safer and more beneficial than painkillers. One of the alternatives to painkillers include Beta-blocker drugs which have shown to significantly reduce the occurrence of migraines. Dr. Badhwar also suggests an antidepressant or anti-seizure medication, occipital nerve blocks as well as BOTOX. For more information on migraines and headaches visit www.phxsleep.com.