



Migraine triggers

Research shows that certain foods adversely affect some people prone to headaches (especially migraines). One of the most successful methods known for desensitizing yourself to foods you're allergic to involves completely eliminating such items from your diet for a period and then gradually trying very small amounts of these foods again. Over time, many people with food allergies are able to build a tolerance to foods that once triggered their allergies.

Headaches caused by food sensitivity work the same way and thus often respond well to this desensitization method. Enclosed is a list of some of the most common migraine triggers, which may help you identify what sets off your headaches, in case you're uncertain. You can eliminate all of these foods at once or try avoiding just a few items at a time. It's important to wait at least a few weeks to a few months before trying them again. If you're trying this technique with more than one food, reintroduce each to your diet just one item at a time. This should not only help you identify your headache triggers, but also to develop a method for possibly desensitizing yourself to them.

It's very helpful to track your research with a food diary, noting the foods you react to, the nature of your symptoms, and how they worsen or improve over time as you explore this self-treatment technique.

Keep in mind that one person's trigger may be another's pleasure. Trial and error is the name of the game. Be patient and thorough in your research. You may be pleased with the results.

Common Triggers

Two of the most common headache triggers are **tyramine**, an amino acid, and **phenylethylamine**, a chemical also found in your brain. Tyramine is found in many foods, including aged cheeses like bleu, cheddar, Gouda, mozzarella, provolone, and Swiss cheese. It's also found in poultry (especially turkey and chicken) and in avocados; bananas; broad beans (butter beans, lima beans, Italian pole beans); nuts; sour cream; yeast breads and yogurt. Phenylamine is found in chocolate, red wine and many cheeses.

Other substances that trigger headaches in many people include:

- **Sodium nitrite**, a preservative that may cause blood vessels to swell. It is found in food coloring, preservatives, and processed meats and fish, such as luncheon meat and hot dogs

- **Monosodium glutamate (MSG)** , a flavor enhancer, often found in canned soups, restaurant food, frozen dinners, processed meats, seasonings and soy sauce
- **Caffeine** , found in many beverages, including coffee, tea and soft drinks, chocolate, many processed foods, and in some medications
- **Aspartame** , an artificial sweetener found in many packaged foods and beverages
- **Alcohol** , especially mixed drinks and red wine

Additional resources

A number of organizations provide free headache information to the general public. Contact the National Headache Foundation: <http://www.headaches.org> (1-888-NHF-5552); or the American Headache Society: www.ahsnet.org (1-800-255-ACHE).

Final note

Many foods cause reactions in people with certain sensitivities. If you think something you eat or drink may be causing your headaches, it's worth the effort to try to identify these foods and eliminate them (at least for awhile) from your diet. You may be able to improve your tolerance to these items by reintroducing them gradually and in small amounts over time. The technique takes time and patience but works for many people.

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