

Self-Help for Migraines (adults)

It is horrible having migraines but there is a lot that you can do to help yourself. The following tips are all based on medical evidence and experience. What works for one person, doesn't work for another so be flexible in your approach and willing to try different strategies. ***The key is learning to control your migraines so that you control them***, rather than the other way around! It goes without saying that a healthy diet, regular exercise and enough sleep are essential starting points!

- **Keep a headache diary**

This is very important to help to identify triggers (e.g. diet, stress etc) and to assess the benefit of interventions. It also helps keep track on painkiller and medication usage. For an example paper diary [click here](#) or for an on-line diary [click here](#). They are also easily available as apps for your phone.

- **Monitor your drug usage**

[Medication Overuse Headache](#) is very common and can easily sneak up on you. By definition, you have this once you are using simple pain killers (such as paracetamol and ibuprofen) more than 15 days a month, and 'triptans' or stronger painkillers (e.g. containing codeine) more than 10 days a month. *Do not exceed these limits and if you have already, speak to your GP about this.* Good news, once you have cut down your headaches will get a lot better!

- **Do muscular relaxation exercises**

This takes some time and commitment but is highly effective. There is increasing evidence that in many people migraines (as well as tension headaches) are triggered from muscular 'trigger' points around the base of the skull and relaxation exercises work. For more information and example exercises [click here](#)

- Consider seeing a **physiotherapist**, experienced in helping migraines. This can be highly effective, speak to your GP about this.

- **Stress reduction**

Stress is a major contributory factor to migraine and always makes everything worse. *Learning to control and manage your stress is crucial to better migraine management.* This means taking control of your work and home life so that you can manage your time better, but also making the time to effectively relax. The latter is difficult; one of the great ironies of relaxation, is it is something you have to work at! Mindfulness-based stress reduction is the most effective way to do this. [Click here](#) to find local teachers where those advertising will have completed certain minimum standards in training and experience. Anyone seeking a

mindfulness cognitive based therapy (MBCT) group should assure themselves the person teaching the group meets the national good practice guidelines. Mindfulness groups are also available for people with pain on the NHS via Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust. Their assessment process helps make sure that MBCT is suitable for people who are referred.

If you do not have time to get to a class, do a self-help programme yourself, a suitable book is [Mindfulness, by Mark Williams](#)

- **Tooth Grinding**

If you also have jaw pain you may be a nocturnal 'tooth-grinder'. This causes a common problem called [bruxism](#) and can also trigger tension headaches and migraines. It is caused by stress, but also can be a side-effect of some medications like antidepressants. Seeing your dentist is worthwhile for consideration of a splint (which are unfortunately not available on the NHS). For more about this [click here](#)

- **Posture**

It is thought that a lot of migraines (as well as tension headaches) may be 'cervicogenic', originating from pinched nerves at the back of the neck. This is often caused by poor posture, as modern life leads to us being slumped over keyboards and digital devices. If this is you, work hard on your posture to keep your neck and back as straight as possible (imagine a plumb line attached to the crown of your skull, which keeps pulling you gently upwards to straighten out your neck and back) and get up from the computer at frequent intervals to stretch your neck.

- **Vitamins and minerals**

A healthy diet and watching alcohol and caffeine consumption, is the most important thing but there is also some evidence to support vitamin supplements. NICE recommend Vitamin B2 (riboflavin) as a daily supplement at a dose of 400mg daily. This is not available on prescription, but is easily available from pharmacies. Be warned it makes your pee go very yellow! For more on supplements which may help [click here](#)

- **Acupuncture**

There is high quality scientific evidence that so-called medical acupuncture (needling of muscular trigger points around the base of the skull) by physiotherapists or doctors trained in this technique is highly effective. Although recommended by NICE, unfortunately it is not generally available on the NHS. If you can afford it however, it is worth trying as it can be highly effective.

For more information on self-help, follow these links:

[NHS information on Migraine](#)
[The Migraine Trust](#)