How to Prevent Fibromyalgia Headaches

by MARIANNE BROWN

Understanding Fibromyalgia Headaches

Both headaches and migraines are common in people diagnosed with fibromyalgia.

Research suggests that chronic headaches may occur in as many as 76% of fibromyalgia patients, and is the third most common complained symptom after pain and fatigue.

These headaches can be debilitating, and not only from the physical elements but also how these can affect an individual psychologically too. It can affect not only the quality of life of an individual but result in disability if left untreated.

What are the Symptoms of a Headache?

- Common symptoms of a headache can start with the following:
- Pulsing, sharp, or aching pain.
- Pain on one side of the face only, extending into the eye.
- Head pain that radiates into the neck and shoulder muscles.
- Pain along the tender points on the back of your head and neck.
- Sensitivity to light, sound, or smells.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Dizziness.

Different Types of Headaches Associated with Fibromyalgia

There are three main types of headache:

Migraines

These are quite possibly are the worst of the headaches in terms of pain levels and debilitation.

Migraines can last from four hours up to a week in extreme cases. Sometimes they present an aura, (a ball of light in our field of vision), sometimes not. Sensitivity to light and sound can be felt. Vomiting can occur, the throbbing can also at times feel unbearable and rarely hospitalization may occur.

Migraine tends to be the most common of these headache disorders, with separate studies showing that more than half of those researched suffered from migraines.

Tension Headaches

Tension headaches feel like a tight band that can be felt across the forehead, from one temple to the other.

Sometimes you can feel stiffness in the head, neck, and shoulders. Stress can be a trigger for this type of headache, and this type tends to last a much shorter timescale and intensity than a migraine.

Combination Headaches

This type of headache is a combination of the two detailed above and can start as a tension headache that then progresses into a migraine.

What Causes Fibromyalgia Headaches?

There are many varying reasons as to why the headaches occur, and this can vary from person to person. It is believed that hypersensitivity of the central nervous system characterizes chronic migraine and fibromyalgia, and may thus be even more pronounced when occurring together.

Sensitivity to food, drinks, chemicals, and medications can cause such headaches, as can stress, anxiety, depression, moods and hormonal imbalances and fluctuations (such as the menstrual cycle). Dehydration can also lead to regular headaches.

Another interesting theory has linked sleep disruption (a common side effect of fibromyalgia) with impaired responses to pain; in effect, patients are not able to distract themselves from the physical pain when they are overly tired or fatigued. This can then lead to headaches if you are not getting enough restful sleep.

If you find you are unable to sleep, then I would recommend reviewing your sleep hygiene. Reviewing your sleep hygiene may be a quick win to improving your sleep, as well as again talking to your medical professional. Sleeping medication can help, but can also be addictive and are not recommended for long-term use.

What Can I Do to Reduce the Episodes and Intensity of Headaches?

I find that keeping a diary helps. I jot down daily activities, any food or drink consumed, medications taken, and any other symptoms that accompanied the headache. In my opinion, this gives me invaluable information that I can also share with my medical professional. This has allowed me to make changes to my lifestyle and medications to reduce the regularity and intensity of my fibromyalgia headaches.

Other well researched ideas to try:

- **Diet changes**: You may find that certain foods or drinks trigger your headaches, which makes avoiding them important to how you feel.
- **Exercise**: While exercise helps some people, it's tricky when you have fibromyalgia or, especially, chronic fatigue syndrome. Be sure you're not making yourself worse by overdoing it. Exercise can also lead to better sleep for some individuals.
- **Stress reduction**: Learning to manage and reduce your stress can also help, especially since stress is a major trigger for headaches and migraines. You could try meditation and mindfulness to help manage your stress levels.
- **Essential oils**: I find that peppermint oil works best.
    - Apply a drop of peppermint oil to temples and areas of your head that hurts.
    - For larger areas combine three drops lavender oil, one drop peppermint oil and one drop of coconut or olive oil and massage into the areas that hurt.
    - If you have a vaporizer, add seven drops of lavender oil and three drops of peppermint oil to the water.
- **Magnesium**: Studies have shown that fibromyalgia and migraine sufferers tend to be deficient in magnesium. This mineral helps to calm nerves. Take 300mg twice a day. Include foods that are rich in magnesium in your diet, like nuts, beans, grains, and green veggies and herbs.
- **Cold or hot compresses**: Apply an ice pack wrapped in a towel to your head or apply heat to the back of your neck to loosen up muscles that tighten with tension headaches.
- **Stay hydrated**: One of the most common reasons people get headaches is because they are dehydrated.

Drink six to eight glasses of water every day.

- **Review current medications**: Some medications can cause headaches; therefore speak to your medical professional about your symptoms.
- **Non-pharmacologic measures**: Beyond preventive medication, include acupuncture, chiropractic, biofeedback, hypnotherapy, physical therapy, and transcranial magnetic stimulation.