

At-home migraine relief: Fact vs. fiction

Migraines are a part of life for many. From stress to dehydration to a woman's menstrual cycle and even more serious issues such as a stroke, the headaches can pop up often. And they're something you should know how to manage.

[Amber Oberheim](#), APRN, a primary care provider at OSF HealthCare, says migraines can often be treated with ibuprofen (Advil is a common brand name) or naproxen (Aleve), plus lifestyle changes including better sleep. But, an online search will also yield plenty of non-medicinal, at-home remedies. Experts will remind you that these aren't cure-alls. But it's important to know what works and what doesn't.

Myth vs. fact

- A cold or warm cloth on the head and neck: Stick to cold, Oberheim says.

"One of the theories for why migraines happen is vasodilation, or increased blood flow to your brain," Oberheim explains. "So we talk about using a *cold* compress over your eyes, on the back of your neck or at the top of your head. That cold sensation constricts blood vessels, thereby decreasing blood flow."

Oberheim adds that there are even migraine caps that stay in the freezer until use. Those are available over the counter at retail outlets.

- Rest and deep breathing: Oberheim says there's no guarantee that your migraine will be gone when you wake up from a nap. But, she says rest and deep breathing can't hurt. Take a break in a cool, dark room, and avoid screens and loud noises.
- Caffeine: It's good general advice to ingest caffeine in moderation for heart and mental health. But, Oberheim says a soda might help with that headache.

"We look at medications in Excedrin Migraine [pills]. Caffeine is one of them," Oberheim says. "Caffeine has been proven to be effective sometimes in early management of migraine headaches."

- Supplements: There's a lot to choose from in this aisle of the pharmacy. And experts warn that you should choose with provider guidance since supplements aren't regulated like others under the eye of the United States Food and Drug Administration. However, Oberheim says *some* research has shown that taking vitamin B2 (also called riboflavin) and magnesium daily can help with the number of migraines.
- Massaging your head: It's a tactic some of us learned when we were kids. Massaging your temples (the area between your eyes and the top of your ears) could help with head pain.

"I don't think there's any data that would support that. I think it's more of a comfort," Oberheim says. "When you're experiencing pain and you can have a sensation that's not pain somewhere on your body, it might help lessen the pain."

For example, Oberheim says when her patients are getting a blood draw through an IV in their elbow, a provider might scratch their upper arm (between the point of pain and the brain) to "confuse" the pain signal and lessen the discomfort. The same logic applies to rubbing your head during a migraine.

- Taking a shower: It depends, Oberheim says.

"I could see if stress or muscle tension is creating a headache. Taking a warm shower or bath to relax might help," Oberheim says. "However, if we're thinking about a classic migraine with the theory of increased blood flow to the brain, taking a hot bath or shower might actually make it worse.

"It never hurts to try, but I think it's going to be patient-specific," she adds.

When in doubt

Oberheim says some people have a history of migraines and know how to manage them. But if the headaches suddenly increase in frequency or intensity, you should see a health care provider. Also, talk to a provider if you have questions about starting or changing at-home treatment. The provider can determine what works for you. You don't want *new* medications to negatively interact with drugs you're *already* on, for example.

"Often, a migraine can last for longer than a typical headache. It can be accompanied by symptoms like nausea, light sensitivity and noise sensitivity," Oberheim says, warning of the dangers if migraines are not treated quickly. "There are certain types of migraines that can also affect your vision."

Temporary decreased function of your limbs is another rare, but possible side effect, Oberheim says.

Learn more

Read more about how to spot and treat a migraine on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).