

Eating Your Way to Migraine
Freedom: the Migraine Miracle “Diet”

by Josh Turknett, MD

MY MIGRAINE MIRACLE



For Your Migraine-Free Future

Two Birds, One Stone

For me, eating this way simply began as a path towards better health. After coming to the realization that what I'd considered to be a healthy diet was wrong, I changed my eating habits. I did so solely as a means for achieving best possible health and longevity.

Serendipitously, this also turned out to be the best way to prevent migraines, and people all over the world are now experiencing the same miraculous effect on their migraines that I did.

So, in effect, the way of eating outlined below kills two birds with one stone - it promotes optimal health and slays the migraine beast. Over the past few years working with my patients, I've made certain modifications to this approach that are tailored specifically to the migraine sufferer.

As you'll see, eating an ancestral diet is not about finding one single ideal diet. It's simply about avoiding foods that are harmful, most of which, not surprisingly, just so happen to have only been introduced recently in the course of human history.

Directive 1: Eliminate Foods with Gluten Flours (Wheat, Barley, and Rye) and Added Sugar

This is the cornerstone piece of the ancestral diet for migraines, the one that will make the greatest impact on migraine reduction and your overall health.

This is also the toughest piece for many, as flour and sugar have become the primary caloric source for most people these days. They are cheap, and they are a primary ingredient in virtually every processed convenience food, though they provide virtually no nutritional value. And, in reality, they represent only a tiny fraction of the available foods we humans can eat. Just ask our

hunter gatherer ancestors, who got along just fine without them for over two million years.

By taking this step, not only will you greatly reduce your chances of triggering migraines, you'll also likely lose body fat, and you'll greatly reduce your risk of developing a host of chronic illnesses, including diabetes, high blood pressure, dementia, heart disease, cancers, and stroke.

Directive 2: Eliminate Processed Foods (Or Only Eat Whole Foods)

As mentioned above, most processed foods contain flour and sugar, so directive 1 takes care of a lot of this stuff already. If it comes in a colorful box, can stay on your shelf for long periods of time without spoiling, or isn't something you could either hunt and kill or grow in a garden, then chances are you shouldn't be eating it.

Directive 3: Eat Mostly Animals and Plants

Thanks to our long evolutionary history of consuming the meat of other animals, we're well adapted to eat almost anything with legs, fins, or wings. Animals are our richest source of energy and nutrients. This includes their organ meats, which are a dense energy source and likely were a favored part of the animal for most of human history.

With plants, we must tread a bit more lightly, as most of them (like cereal grains!) aren't suitable for human consumption. Since plants can't run or bite, they discourage us from eating them by making us ill, or killing us, when we do so. Thankfully, we have a couple of million years of accumulated cultural wisdom to draw upon (a process that likely cost more than a few prehistoric

humans their lives). Stick to the fresh produce section, and you should be fine.

Directive 4: Cook with Butter, Animal Fat, Coconut Oil, Olive Oil, or Ghee (Clarified Butter)

Don't cook with canola, seed, or grain-derived oils. These contain high amounts of unstable, oxidation-prone omega-6 fatty acids that tip the biological scale toward widespread, systemic inflammation. Butter, animal fats (including lard, tallow, and duck fat), coconut, olive oil, and ghee, on the other hand, are all high in healthful saturated fat. Unlike the omega-6 PUFAs that are highly reactive when in contact with oxygen, which leads to oxidative cellular damage, saturated fatty acids are very stable. Don't forget to read labels to make sure an unhealthy oil (like soybean, which is seemingly in all processed foods these days) hasn't snuck its way into the food you're buying.

Directive 5: When Eating Fruit, Choose Berries of Various Sorts over the Sweeter Stuff

In general, the sweeter fruits (bananas, apples, grapes, pears) are less nutritionally dense and will also lead to a sharper rise in blood sugar, which, as a migraineur, is something you wish to avoid. This doesn't mean you need to give up sweet fruits, just eat them in moderation, and always in the context of a larger meal (which helps to blunt the blood sugar rise). For many, eating a sweet fruit on an empty stomach is a big migraine trigger. The same goes for concentrated fruit juices, which should be avoided.

Berries on the other hand, are both nutritionally dense and lower in sugar, and as such should be the fruits you reach for first.

Directive 6: Drink mainly water

Unsweetened tea (or tea sweetened with stevia or Splenda) and coffee (with or without cream or natural sweetener) are also perfectly fine in moderation. Avoid alcohol for the first few weeks of the diet. Once your migraines are well under control, you can experiment with drinking it again in moderation. Wine and clear liquors are best. Beer can be problematic for some, particularly those who are gluten sensitive (though gluten-free options continue to expand). Avoid sweetened cocktails. And don't overdo it regardless of what alcohol you drink, or a migraine is a virtual certainty.

Finer Points

For those with more than four migraines per month, limit carbohydrates to less than 100 grams per day for at least the first two weeks. Ramping up your body's fat burning machinery is one of the primary goals of this way of eating, and this shift is determined in large part by the amount of carbohydrates in the diet. The fewer carbohydrates eaten, the faster this shift will occur.

For those with more than ten migraines per month, limit carbohydrates to less than 50 grams per day for the first two weeks. At this level of carbohydrate consumption, there will be significant production of ketone bodies in the liver, which can be burned by the brain in place of glucose for energy, conferring additional protective benefit against migraines. Furthermore, the production of ketones may also offer protection against neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases (Stafstrom and Rho 2012).

Eat when you're hungry, stop when you're satisfied. When it comes to how frequently you should eat, the primary directive is

to listen to your body. One of the great benefits of eating an ancestral diet is that the feelings of hunger and satiety, no longer subverted by evolutionarily inappropriate foods, are now accurate indicators of your energy and nutritional needs. In other words, you can leave it to the hidden wisdom of your body to decide how often to eat. You may well find after eating this way for some time that you can go much longer between meals than you used to. This isn't surprising, as we've adapted to withstand the natural ebb and flow of food availability, as long as we're eating evolutionarily appropriate foods. Freedom from the three-meals-a-day confinement is yet another of the perks of eating this way.

You may crave carbohydrates/sugar initially. During the first week or two after shifting to this way of eating, your body will be going through some significant changes as it ramps up its fat-burning systems. It takes the body about a week or two to fully adapt to this change. During this period, you may find yourself craving sugar, and a small number of you may feel lethargic. This is particularly true if you were consuming a diet fairly high in sugar (sodas, packaged snack foods, etc.) beforehand. Eating fruit and using natural sweeteners occasionally can help. Once the transition is complete, the cravings will disappear, and avoiding carbs and sweets will become much easier.

Exercise. Reduction in migraine headache frequency is just one of the many benefits of exercise. Studies have shown that regular exercise is just as effective as the leading prescription medication in preventing migraines. No need to overdo it, either—to reap the benefits, around twenty minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (50 to 70 percent of your maximum heart rate) three times a week is all you need.

Unless you are lactose intolerant or allergic to milk proteins (casein allergy), then dairy is fine. Avoid the low or non-fat products, where the milk sugars are artificially concentrated - drink whole milk, eat full-fat yogurt, use cream in your coffee, et cetera.

Though their effects on migraine frequency may not be as profound as the above measures, the following is also recommended to improve overall health:

When feasible, consume animals that were raised as close to their natural setting as possible.

The ideal scenario is to know the farmer you buy your meat from, and go see the animals for yourself. Farmers markets are also great to find naturally raised animal products. If in the grocery store, then look for “grassfed” beef, and “pastured” pork, chicken, and eggs as markers of animals that were raised humanely and naturally (the “organic” label doesn’t guarantee this).

Get your vitamin D. Most of us spend far more time indoors than our prehistoric ancestors. Since much of our bodily stores of vitamin D are produced in the skin after exposure to sunlight, many of us have become vitamin D deficient.

The best way to ensure that your body is replete with vitamin D is to get plenty of midday sun (without sunscreen, which blocks the ultraviolet light needed for vitamin D production). In general, about 20 to 30 minutes of midday sun for a lighter-skinned individual is an adequate amount. Those with darker skin should aim for around an hour or so. If this isn’t feasible for you, then supplement with 1,000 to 2,000 International Units (IUs) of vitamin D daily.