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Accurate Education

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM)

Nutraceuticals for Migraines

Certain vitamins, minerals, nutraceuticals and dietary changes can help reduce migraine frequency and severity. Nutraceuticals—particularly CoQ10, riboflavin, and magnesium—achieve reductions in migraine frequency comparable to many traditional prescription medications. Nutraceuticals generally are better tolerated with fewer side events and lower discontinuation rates than prescription medications. The following supplements are safe with minimal side effects and they can be used with prescription medications. They generally work by supporting (mitochondrial) brain energy production and by reducing inflammation.

IMPORTANT: Nutraceuticals often require at least 3 months to achieve benefit and they work best in combination with others

Supplements With the Strongest Evidence - Highly Recommended

1. Riboflavin (Vitamin B2)

What it does: Riboflavin helps brain cells mitochondrial function to produce energy to prevent migraine attacks from starting.

The evidence: Studies show that about 6 out of 10 people who take riboflavin experience at least a 50% reduction in migraine severity and it typically reduces frequency of migraines by 1-2 per month.

Who might respond: Possibly those with pure migraine (w/o tension-type), non-European descent may respond better

Dose: 400 mg once daily (Blood level associations unknown)

When to expect results: 4-12 weeks

Duration: Continue taking it as long as it's helping

Side effects: Very safe. Your urine will turn bright yellow-orange, which is completely harmless

2. Magnesium (Mg)

What it does: Magnesium helps regulate nerve signals, blood vessel function, and brain chemicals involved in migraines. Many people with migraines have low magnesium levels.

The evidence: Magnesium reduces migraine severity and frequency by about 2-3 attacks/month.

Dose: 500-600 mg daily

Best forms: Mg citrate or Mg glycinate (may also offer better improvement of anxiety and sleep) are better absorbed and tolerated than Mg oxide. Pre-clinical research suggests magnesium L-threonate may have chronic pain advantages

When to expect results: 4-12 weeks

Side effects: Diarrhea or stomach upset, at higher doses. Avoid if you have kidney problems.

3. Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10)

What it does: An antioxidant that helps cell mitochondria produce energy and protects brain cells from damage.

The evidence: >50% of people experience at least a 50% reduction in migraines.

Prediction of Benefit: Women, diabetics/pre-diabetics, mitochondrial dysfunction (elevated lactate), inc. oxidative stress

Dose: 100-400 mg daily (most studies use 300 mg) with a meal containing some fat

When to expect results: 4-12 weeks

Side effects: Minimal side effects, occasional mild stomach upset.

Synergy: Co10 and L-Carnitine (500 mg/day) significantly reduced lactate levels, migraine severity, duration, frequency,



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CAM Tx for Headaches

4. Vitamin D-3

What it does: Mechanisms how Vit D helps migraine include anti-inflammatory, antioxidant effects, nerve protection, and modulation of nerve activity

The evidence: Levels between 50-100 ng/mL may be assoc w. substantially fewer migraines

Dose: 1,000 to 4,000 IU/day, but preferentially based on blood levels

Synergy: Combining with probiotics may improve response

5. Omega-3 Fatty Acids (EPA and DHA)

What they do: Reduce inflammation in the brain and nervous system.

The evidence: Significantly reduce migraine frequency and severity, especially in women.

Dose: 1,800 to 2,400 mg EPA + DHA daily (check the label for EPA + DHA content, not just "fish oil")

Duration: 12 weeks minimum

Side effects: Occasional mild stomach upset. Take with meals to minimize this.

Dietary approach: Eating fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines) 2-3 x/week & reducing vegetable oils helps.

Supplements With Moderate Evidence - Recommended

6. Alpha-Lipoic Acid

Dose: 300-600 mg daily

Evidence: Reduces migraine frequency and severity

7. Curcumin (Turmeric)

Dose: Nano-curcumin formulations work best (600 mg twice daily)

Evidence: Works especially well when combined with omega-3s or CoQ10

8. Ginger

Dose: 250-500 mg at the start of a migraine

Evidence: May help reduce acute migraine pain, similar to some medications

Common combinations for enhanced effectiveness

These simple combinations target multiple mechanisms simultaneously and work better than single supplements:

1. **Co10 + L-Carnitine (500 mg/day)** (a mitochondrial energy duo)
2. **Riboflavin + Magnesium + CoQ10** (a mitochondrial energy trio)
3. **Omega-3 + Curcumin** (anti-inflammatory combination)
4. **CoQ10 + Curcumin** (mitochondrial energy + anti-inflammatory)

See the handout: "**Synergy Combinations of Nutraceuticals for Migraine** for more enhancement combinations

Dietary Approaches

The therapeutic doses of these nutraceuticals (100-600 mg daily) generally requires supplements, as food usually don't achieve these levels. See the handouts "**Chia Seeds**" and "**Superfoods rich in migraine-beneficial nutrients.**"

- **Drink 8-10 glasses of water through the day.** Dehydration is a common migraine trigger.
- **Fiber & Probiotics:** Probiotics & dietary fiber 25-38 gms/day (25gm - women, 38gm - men), Reduce migraines frequency
- **Consider limiting common migraine trigger foods:** Alcohol (especially red wine) excessive Caffeine, Processed meats that contain nitrates, Aged cheeses (contain tyramine), Artificial Sweeteners (especially aspartame), MSG (monosodium glutamate)

