

Common Food Triggers

There are many different types of migraine triggers. A trigger is something that increases your chances of having a migraine headache. Often, one trigger alone won't cause a headache, but if two or more triggers are present at the same time, a migraine may develop. This can make it difficult to detect specific migraine triggers and it can take some effort to determine what they are.

Food triggers are important for some patients, and less important for others. Some foods that patients commonly report can trigger a migraine are listed below:

- Red wine and other alcohol
- Caffeine excess and caffeine withdrawal
- Citrus fruits
- Nuts
- Onions
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG) (often found in Chinese food, meat tenderizer, and many canned, packaged and prepared foods)
- Nitrites (found in processed, cured, or preserved meat)
- Aged or strong cheeses, sour cream, yogurt, other dairy products
- Smoked fish, pickled herring
- Chocolate
- Eggs
- Beans
- Fatty foods
- Yeast extracts
- Aspartame

Caffeine and Migraine Attacks

For many, caffeine is an essential part of modern life, but it can have effects on the brain that influence migraine attacks.

Caffeine affects pain. For example, some migraine sufferers find that a cup of coffee can help relieve their migraine. Painkiller medication may also contain some caffeine.

People can become dependent on caffeine. When caffeine is used on a regular basis, the brain starts to adjust to it. Caffeine dependency can occur after only 7 days. Taking 100 mg or more of caffeine daily may increase the chance of developing very frequent headache (chronic daily headache).

Although more research needs to be done, caffeine can affect migraine sufferers in two ways: Firstly, in higher doses it may result in "medication overuse" headache in the same way as a pain

killer such as acetaminophen. Secondly, when a regular caffeine user misses a dose or two, this may trigger a migraine attack.

What should a migraine sufferer do about caffeine? Most people keep consuming caffeine more to avoid withdrawal symptoms than for the alertness and mild sense of well-being that caffeine can produce. If migraine headaches are frequent, then cut back caffeine to no more than 2 days a week, in the same way that migraine sufferers are asked to limit the frequency of their painkiller medication. If migraines are a major problem, sufferers should consider slowly tapering off caffeine use and eliminating completely for several months to see if migraines improve.

Caffeine Levels in Common Beverages and Foods

Product	Caffeine (Average mg)	Serving size
Hot Beverages		
Black tea	43 – 50 mg	1 cup – 8oz – 237 ml Note: The caffeine content increases as the serving size increases.
Green tea	30 mg	
Hot chocolate	5 mg	
Brewed & instant coffee	76 – 179 mg	
Decaffeinated coffee	3 – 5 mg	
Espresso – based coffees (latte, cappuccino, Americano etc)	58 – 106mg	
Espresso shot	58 – 106mg	1 shot – 1oz – 30 ml
<i>Note: The variability of caffeine in coffee may be due to many factors, including the variety of coffee bean, roasting method, the proportion of coffee to water used in preparation, and the length of brewing time.</i>		
Cold Beverages		
Chocolate milk	8 mg	1 cup – 8oz – 237ml
Cola	36 – 50 mg	12oz can – 355ml
Energy drink	33 – 77mg	8 oz can
Foods		
Milk chocolate bar	7 mg	1 bar – 28g
Dark chocolate bar	19 mg	1 bar – 28g
Chocolate cake	36 mg	1 piece – 95g