

BRAIN PAIN

By MONICA MONTAG, MA, HHP, CN

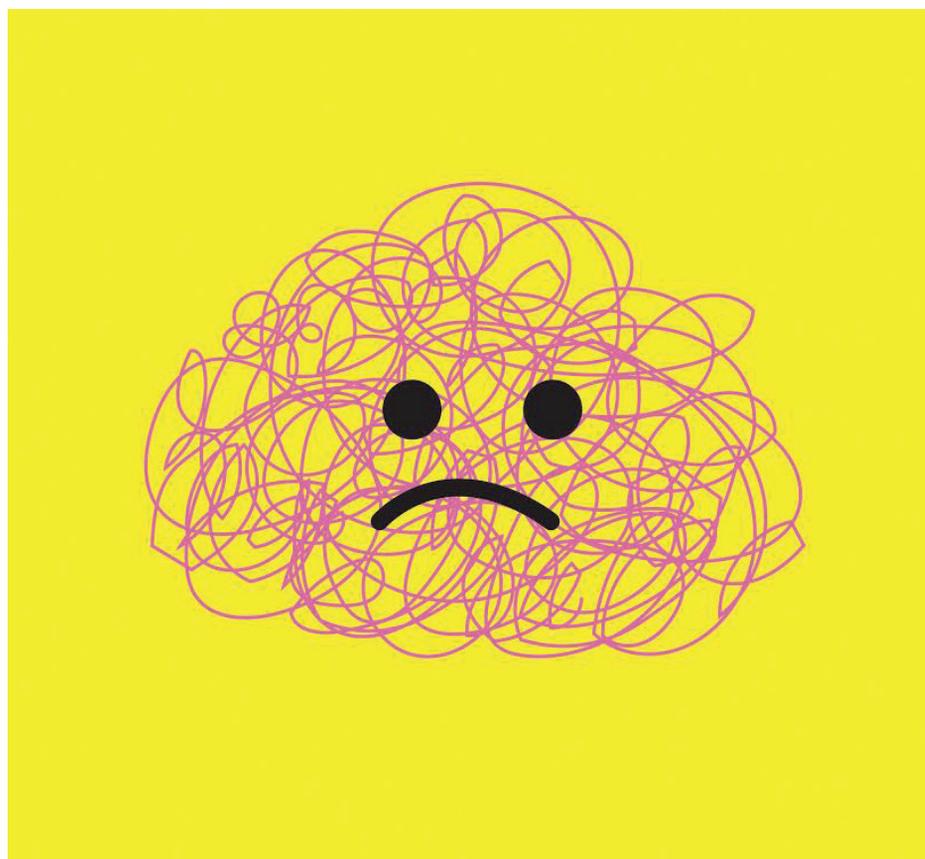
Take a few steps to assess the source of your headaches. Stress and tension are common triggers for headaches. Calcium and magnesium supplements effectively relax tense muscles, and herbs such as valerian and passionflower have a soothing effect on the mind.

UGH, DON'T YOU HATE headaches? They can totally ruin your day and become downright debilitating if they become chronic. There are so many possible causes of headaches, and although Advil or Tylenol will most often knock one out, they don't really get to the underlying cause and, over time, have adverse effects.

That's when the health detectives go to work. First thing we do is to look at the simplest causes first, and work our way down the list of possibilities. Then we match a solution with the cause for permanent relief. Only rarely are drastic measures needed, such as strong pain relievers and expensive testing.

The most common cause of headaches is dehydration. These headaches usually occur later in the day, in the afternoon or early evening. The solution is simple: make sure you're getting enough fluids throughout the day, especially now when indoor heat dries us out. A good rule of thumb is to drink about half your body weight in pounds as the number of ounces of fluids each day. For example, if you weigh 140 pounds aim for 70 ounces. Most of the 70 ounces should be pure water. At the first sign of a headache, drink a full glass of water and see if you get relief.

Stress and tension are common triggers for headaches. Calcium and magnesium supplements effectively relax tense muscles, and herbs such as valerian and passionflower have a



soothing effect on the mind. There are many different herbal/vitamin combinations that calm the catecholamines, which are stress hormones that make us tense and achy. One product we especially like was formulated by a local psychologist and is endorsed by Dr. Deepak Chopra, the mind-body pioneer. It's called Endorphinate and is extremely effective.

Sinus congestion can also be the

culprit behind miserable headaches, especially in the spring and fall. We recommend a combination of decreasing your intake of mucus-producing foods, self-acupressure and herbal decongestants that won't make you groggy. For a more complete treatment of this topic, check out the last issue of *Centered* or visit www.bewellassociates.com.

Headaches that occur during the

week before the onset of a woman's menstrual cycle are considered hormonal headaches. In most cases they signal the need for more progesterone, the calming hormone that often diminishes during peri-menopause. It's also the hormone that's most directly affected by stress since it indirectly helps our bodies produce cortisol, the stress hormone. If you need increasing amounts of cortisol to keep up with your daily life, you'll actually "steal" from your progesterone reserves to make cortisol. Some signs and symptoms of low progesterone, include menstrual headaches, breast tenderness, ovarian cysts, uterine fibroids, and anxiety and insomnia that are worse the week before your period.

Headaches that occur upon awakening and wear off as the day goes on may be from low thyroid function. Further clues that the thyroid is the culprit include poor circulation, sluggishness, hair loss, dry skin and constipation. Low thyroid doesn't always require medication, but sometimes simply a cleaned-up liver so the hormones you do produce can be more effectively absorbed. Or, you may require more of the thyroid hormone building nutrients such as tyrosine and iodine, that are either depleted by chronic stress (tyrosine) or missing in the diet (iodine).

Adrenal fatigue can also cause headaches. These are usually accompanied by low blood pressure, manifesting as weakness, dizziness and fatigue throughout the day. Low blood sugar, which is related to adrenal fatigue, can also contribute to the malaise, headaches and spaciness that often accompany this condition.

An increasing problem, especially among our kids, are long term headaches caused by concussions.

Reducing oxidative stress with high doses of vitamin C is an effective way to reduce these headaches (Caution: do not use high dose vitamin C if your child is on Adderal or similar medications).

We also find that in both children and adults, hidden food allergies can be a major cause of headaches. You would need to have these evaluated through bloodwork by testing for IgG antibodies. Headaches often clear up when the offending food/foods are eliminated.

There are some other more unusual solutions to headaches. One of them involves filtering certain wavelengths of light that may be irritating the brain. Dr. Helen Irlen pioneered the use of specially made glasses to help people remove these irritants, with good success. These can also be helpful for children with ADD/ADHD, ASD and learning disabilities.

Another more unusual approach is to wear a pendant or watch with an embedded chip that neutralizes electromagnetic radiation. EMRs can cause headaches in sensitive people. We recently had great success using this with one of our clients who didn't respond to any other intervention.

If chronic headaches plague your life, think outside the box to get to the root cause for complete resolution. Don't just rely on temporary pharmaceutical band-aids, which may have long-term side effects. Be smart and be healthy! ❖

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Monica Montag, MA, HHP, CN is a board certified nutritionist, certified Holistic Lifestyle Teacher and health detective. She founded BeWell Associates more than 25 years ago.

Boalsburg Apothecary

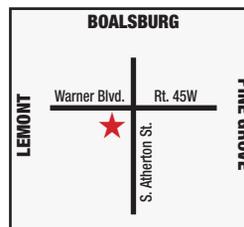
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