



Migraine.com

UNDERSTANDING

# Migraine Triggers

Physical Activity  
Weather  
Lights  
Allergies  
Foods  
Drinks  
Stress  
Pollution  
Noise

A patient guide from Migraine.com



It is our goal to create the best and largest online community of experts and patients dedicated exclusively to migraines. On the following pages you will find excerpts from Migraine.com. Visit the site for more in-depth articles, expert advice, online tools, forums, and more.

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# Introduction to migraine triggers

Identifying your migraine triggers is a crucial, yet challenging, part of migraine management.

Although there are some migraine triggers that are more common than others, they can vary greatly from one person to another... and while certain triggers can be avoided altogether, others remain frustratingly uncontrollable!

We've asked the team at [Migraine.com](https://migraine.com) to share their personal experiences with some of the most common migraine triggers, including tips for **trigger identification, avoidance, and management**.

You can find further information on migraine triggers, as well as tools, forums, and more on [Migraine.com](https://migraine.com).



## Further reading

View our Special Report on migraine triggers on [Migraine.com](https://migraine.com) for additional information and discussion on migraine triggers.

# What is a migraine trigger?

There is often confusion regarding the difference between a migraine cause and trigger. Migraine causes are the underlying reasons in the body, especially in the brain, that may chemically lead to migraines. **Migraine triggers are factors that contribute to migraine attacks.**

Triggers increase the risk of the migraine attack occurring, although migraine triggers do not cause the migraine disorder in individuals. Different people have different triggers, therefore what may lead to a migraine attack in one person may not cause any discomfort in another.



stories

Learn how others manage their migraine triggers - in their own words. Migraine stories on [Migraine.com](https://www.migraine.com).

# Common triggers



*Triggers can vary greatly from one person to another.*

# Common triggers - food and drink

Foods, drink and eating habits have long been blamed for triggering migraines in sufferers. Some studies show that about 20 percent of migraine sufferers count certain foods as triggers. Other studies report that anywhere from 7 percent to 44 percent of migraine sufferers point to certain foods as triggers.

**Specific foods may serve as triggers in some individuals, while others might suffer a migraine attack if they miss a meal.**

Studies show that almost half of people with migraines have attacks if they fast.

Another belief is that the food cravings are actually part of the disease which leads to eating non-typical foods, such as chocolate.

An **elimination diet** is a great way to identify food & drink triggers

Often, food additives or ingredients are triggers for some people. Some examples include:

- Alcohol
- Artificial sweeteners
- Caffeine\*
- Cheese
- Chocolate
- Food dyes
- Gluten
- MSG

*Caffeine is an ingredient in many migraine treatments. However caffeine withdrawal can be a trigger for some.*

# Food and drink trigger checklist

## **Alcohol**

beer, wine, etc.

## **Cheese**

## **Chocolate**

## **Citrus Fruit**

## **Coffee, tea, cola**

other items containing caffeine

## **Dairy products**

## **Ham, hot dogs**

other cured meats

## **Ice Cream**

other frozen foods

### **Don't forget...**

Migraine triggers are different for everyone.

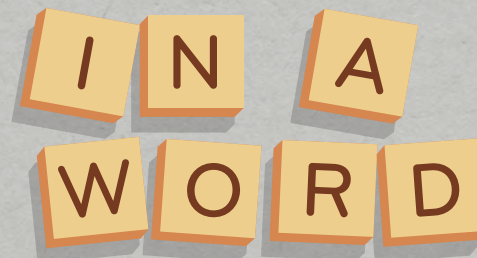
If you suspect an unlisted food or drink item might be a trigger for you, be sure to make a note of it.

# Common triggers - environment

Different factors in the environment – some which the migraine sufferer is unable to control – may lead to a migraine attack. As with many issues related to migraines, it is unclear how these changes in the surroundings lead to migraines. Some researchers believe that people with environmentally-induced migraines are more sensitive to influences in the atmosphere. Changes in the environment have also been blamed on allergies, pain and fatigue.

## Weather changes

For ages, people have reported being able to “feel” an oncoming thunderstorm. This, researchers believe, is a result of a buildup of positive ions in the air which may raise the body’s serotonin. Serotonin is known to be linked to migraines. There are also people who experience seasonal migraines, which means they have far more migraines during certain times of the year.



### In a word...

[Migraine.com](https://www.migraine.com) readers voiced their worst migraine trigger, on one word: weather. After weather-related triggers, stress was reported as the second worst migraine trigger. You can join the conversation on [Migraine.com](https://www.migraine.com).



# Common triggers - environment

## Odors and pollution

Smog, cigarette smoke, perfumes and chemical odors are a trigger for many.

## Bright or flickering lights

Fluorescent or flickering lighting is a common trigger - and even bright natural light outdoors.



## Did you know?

Triggers can change over time. When new triggers develop, it can be easy to miss them.

# Environmental trigger checklist

## Weather Changes

temperature changes, extreme heat or cold weather, humidity, barometric pressure changes and storms

## Odors and Pollution

smog, cigarette smoke, perfumes and chemical odors

## Bright or Flickering Lights

bright or glaring lights, fluorescent lights, flashing lights or screens

## Altitude

## Flying, jet lag, travel or motion

## Dusty or Dry conditions

### Don't forget...

Migraine triggers are different for everyone. If you suspect an unlisted food or drink item might be a trigger for you, be sure to make a note of it.

# Common triggers - physical activity

Sometimes it is everyday activities that launch a migraine attack.

Other times, heavy activity is to blame. Terms such as “weight-lifter’s headache” or “sports-related migraine” are used to describe it because the pain and symptoms arise after physical exertion or effort. Although it is important to stay as active as possible, many people who suffer from persistent migraines avoid certain physical activities hoping to prevent migraine attacks.

Different types of activity can cause migraines in different people.

- **Walking up and down stairs is a common complaint.**
- **Head movement commonly makes migraines worse.**
- **Bending over or rising up can also worsen head pain.**
- **Running and jogging are frequently triggers.**
- **Sexual activity triggers migraines in men four times as often as it does in women.**

## Did you know?

There are several possible reasons for why physical activity can lead to a migraine. Consider the following with any physical activity:

**Dehydration**

**Heat**

**Altitude**

**Low blood sugar**

## Further reading

Migraine and exercise

Dealing with exercise triggers

# Other common triggers

## Stress

Many people report that anxiety, stress, and excitement can trigger an attack for them. Although it is difficult to avoid stressors in life, managing our reaction to stress (not eating well, not sleeping, clenching our teeth) can help managing stress-related migraines.

## Hormones

Hormones serve as migraine triggers in numerous stages of hormonal activity throughout a woman's menstrual cycle and throughout her life.

## Sleep

Sleep related issues are triggers for many people. Insufficient sleep, too much sleep or interrupted sleep are the most frequently reported triggers. Some people may also consider a night guard to prevent grinding of teeth as well as testing for sleep apnea.



### Did you know?

Hormones play a large role for women with migraines. Since migraines and hormones are related, and because women have several fluctuations in hormones, it's no wonder that some 70 percent of migraine sufferers are women.

# Managing migraine triggers

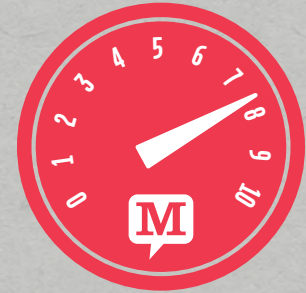


*If you're having trouble identifying your triggers, ask your doctor to help you.*

# Keeping a migraine journal

Some triggers, such as foods, can be avoided, which can prevent some migraines from occurring. Unfortunately, some other triggers, such as weather changes, are nearly impossible to avoid. If you're having trouble identifying your triggers, ask your doctor to help you. While not all triggers are avoidable, it's helpful to identify and eliminate those that are.

**The best way to learn your migraine triggers is to build your own personal migraine triggers list.** To develop your list, you must first keep a migraine journal that lists detailed information on each and every migraine attack. You'll be able to notice a pattern once you start writing down when your migraines occur, what you were doing before each attack, how long the attack lasts and information on your symptoms.



## Did you know?

Try the Migraine.com Migraine Meter - our online journal for recording all of your symptoms, triggers, treatments and more. Find it on [Migraine.com](https://www.migraine.com).

# Talking to your doctor

If you have migraine symptoms that keep returning, discuss them with your primary care doctor or a headache specialist. Preparing in advance will help you make the most of your visit.

## Be prepared

If possible, answer the following questions before your visit:

**How often do migraines occur?**

**What other symptoms do you have?**

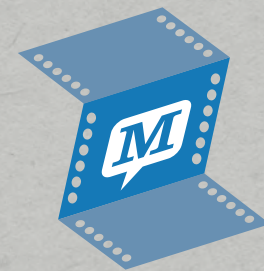
**Have any migraine triggers or causes have been identified?**

**Have you suffered any head injuries?**

**Are you taking any medications?**

**When did the migraine symptoms first begin?**

**Does anyone else in your immediate family suffer from migraines?**



## report

### Did you know?

When you use the Migraine Meter, your migraine information can be printed or shared in a report for your doctor. Find it on [Migraine.com](https://www.migraine.com).