

When the Head Seems to Burst

Chronic headaches are among the modern civilization diseases that affect 12% of the western population. Already in the ancient Ayurvedic scriptures headache is described in detail and treatment methods remain valid until today. With a little patience, stress reduction and targeted nutrition, the pain can be alleviated or even eliminated.

In conventional medicine, headaches, called Shiroga in Ayurveda, are divided into primary and secondary headaches. Secondary headache is the symptomatology of a disease is meant that can be detected by clinical investigations. The cause of primary headache is unknown. Three most important pain symptoms for primary headache are **Tension headache**, **cluster headache** and **migraine headache**.

Already in the ancient Ayurvedic scriptures headache is approached in detail. They describe as a cause of headaches: too heavy and dry food, too much physical activity, inadequate sleep, indigestion and tension. Different causes, symptoms and combinations of headaches require an individualized therapy. Already a few thousand years ago, the sages of Ayurveda medicine developed various treatment strategies tailored to the individual constitution of the patient. These treatment approaches have not lost their relevance until today.

Various kinds of pain

In Ayurveda headache is considered to be a result of an imbalance in the bioenergies Vata, Pitta and Kapha. How different the Doshas Vata, Pitta and Kapha can be involved in the symptoms, show the various pain qualities.

Vata headache is characterized by sudden, unexplained headaches increasing during the night. Noise sensitivity, impaired vision and neurological deficits accompany the attack. **Firm bandages** around the head and **warm treatments** can alleviate the attack. The contradictory principle of the therapy is clearly shown: Vata is light, flexible and cool, so the bandage is firm. This gives stability and warmth.

If headache is hot and burning and heat is perceivable in the eyes, nose, throat or ears, pain quality points to **Pitta dominance**. The patient reacts with photosensitivity, heartburn and acid vomiting. Pain decreases at night and through **cooling measures**.

Swollen facial areas, especially around the eyes, **heaviness** and a **cool sensation** in the head area, accompanied by **nausea**, are symptoms of **Kapha headache**.

In migraine (Suryavarta), all three Doshas are involved in the pain. There is severe pain affecting the region of the neck, eyes and eyebrows, zygomatic bone and temples. Pain starts in the morning, increasing its intensity until noon and decreasing towards the evening. A migraine starts with a Vata imbalance. Hyperactive nerve cells send impulses to the blood vessels and cause a tension and shortening of the veins, which then widen and expand again. It releases prostaglandins, serotonin and other inflammatory agents that cause a throbbing sensation of pain.

Pay attention to your diet

The predisposition for migraine may be hereditary. If one has a disposition to these headache attacks, most diverse influences can trigger a migraine: too long stays in the sun, in the snow or in

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the wind belong to it or a sudden weather change. You should also observe whether there is a change in your sleep rhythm or whether you do not sleep enough. Triggers may also be suppression of natural needs and indigestion. You should observe your dietary habits: **Alcoholic drinks and food additives such** as nitrates (in fast food, sausages, roasted meats, hot peppers), **mature cheese, drinks and monosodium glutamate**(MSG, often contained in Asian dishes, and also an ingredient of the seasoning called Aromat) may be responsible for approximately **30% of all migraine attacks**.

The intake of excessive caffeine or a sudden caffeine withdrawal, but also the particular combination of different foods can trigger a migraine. In the female cycle, the periods of menstruation and ovulation can increase susceptibility. But according to Ayurveda also a long, rigid posture of the head or too loud speaking is a trigger for a migraine attack.

However, one of the most common causes is **emotional distress**, often caused by suppressed feelings that can occur in stressful situations. These include anxiety, worry, excitement or exhaustion. They enhance muscle tension and dilation of blood vessels and increase the intensity of migraine. A so-called migraine diary can help to find out the triggering factors.

Symptoms of migraine headache come in many forms. These may be the following:

- A throbbing or beating headache that starts dull and grows into a throbbing pain. The pain usually worsens due to physical activity. It can move from one side of the head to the other, appear on the forehead or affect the entire head area.
- Sudden headache at night, for no apparent reason.
- Sensitivity to light, noise and odors, nausea and vomiting. Additionally there may occur stomach problems, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, extreme sensation of warmth or coldness, paleness, fatigue, dizziness, blurred vision, diarrhea, in rare cases this may be in connection with fever.

Most migraine attacks last about 4 hours, and severe attacks can last up to a week. The frequency of the attacks can be very different and depends on the constitution of the person affected. An attack can occur every few days or at intervals of two to four times a month and also once or twice a year. For those persons affected, these attacks are a severe impairment of health and conventional medicine may provide sudden relief, but does not prevent from the next migraine attack.

Health advice/ Dinacharya

Avoid a Vata increasing diet which means dry, light, raw and cold food such as crisp bread, leafy vegetables, corn or chickpeas. A Pitta increasing diet is also unfavorable: sour food, sour fruits, tomatoes and too spicy seasoning. Be careful with stimulants and Srota (channels) blocking food. These are yogurt, cheese, sour cream, sausage, meat and eggs.

Recommended food is: warm milk, ghee (cleared butter), honey, cane sugar, almonds, zucchini, artichokes, pumpkin, fennel, grapes, honeydew melons, sweet apples and dates. Drink enough warm water. In an acute attack, chewing a clove may help.

Avoid stressful situations, excessive workload and temperature stimuli. Integrate relaxation techniques, breathing exercises and meditation into your daily routine.

If you feel the onset of headache, pull both earlobes down and yawn vigorously. This decreases pressure in the blood vessels and reduces the headache.

Massage the pain away

Migraine can be well treated with Ayurveda. However, it takes some patience, as Ayurveda approaches the cause of the pain and stabilizes the psychological factors. The treatment strategy for migraine is carefully adjusted to the constitution of the person affected. Special emphasis is drawn on health and nutritional therapy whereby the main focus is on stress reduction and a targeted diet. On the one hand, the training of self-perception opens the view to recognize and accept your own limits and, on the other hand, helps to better use and refill your own resources.

„A migraine starts with a Vata-Disbalance“

Therapeutic therapy ranges from dietary measures to Nasya (treatment with nasal drops), gentle head massages, Shirodhara, Takradhara (treatment with buttermilk), Dhurma Pana (medicated smoke inhaled through the nose), chakra massages, special foot baths up to relaxing body massages. For therapeutic measures, it is advisable to consult a medical doctor or naturopathic practitioner.

The treatments normalize hyperactivity of the nerve cells and regulate the blood circulation to the brain. The sinuses are cleansed from deposited secretions and toxins. This helps to reduce the pressure laid on them. The treatment is accompanied by Ayurvedic medicine as well as health advices that harmonize and stabilize the organism holistically to prevent a migraine attack.

Ayurveda recommends specific yoga exercises in addition to a therapy. Instructions for stress reduction and relaxation are very suitable. The physical exercises support the cleaning process and additionally stimulate the blood circulation. Patience and perseverance help to remove the breeding ground for the phenomenon of a migraine.

Basics

The Doshas or bioenergies are built through the connection of the five elements that are present in everything: in human, animal, stone, plant, cosmos. The basic constitution of a human being, Prakriti, is determined according to the respective elemental characteristics of the basic constitution.

Vata stands for the principle of motion, formed by the elements air and ether. Pitta contains the principle of transformation, formed by the elements fire and water, and the bioenergy Kapha stands for construction and structure, formed by the elements water and earth. In order to rebalance and restore the forces in the body, Ayurveda works with the contradictory principle. This means: where speed prevails, calmness is opposed, where dullness and inertia prevail, dynamics have an energizing and invigorating effect. Coldness is balanced with heat, dryness with moisture.

Contact address

Kerstin Tschinkowitz

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**Freiestrasse 44
CH-2502 Biel / Bienne
info@ayurvedabalance.ch**

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