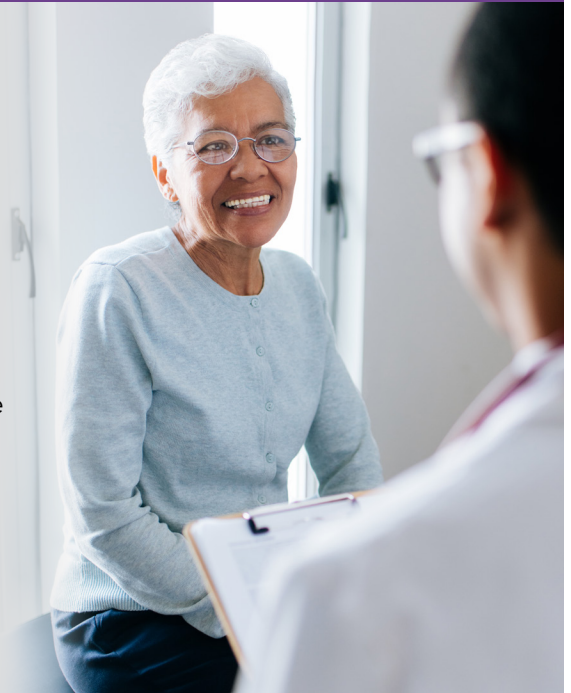


FAQ: Understanding Preventive Treatment for Migraine

Preventive treatment for migraine can help you experience more pain-free days by reducing the number of attacks

Managing migraine can make you feel like you need many medications at your side. Acute medications help stop attacks that have already started. However, a preventive migraine treatment can help reduce the number, severity and duration of attacks.

The goal of preventive treatment is to reduce the frequency and overall impact of migraine attacks. Preventive treatment may also improve the effectiveness of acute treatment. This helps prevent emergency department and acute care visits, and reduces overuse of acute medications. Preventive treatment will not eliminate migraine attacks completely, but it can significantly improve your quality of life.



Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need preventive treatment?

Preventive therapies are generally recommended for people who experience:

1. Frequent attacks (four or more per month)
2. Disabling attacks even while using acute treatment
3. Poor or no response to acute treatment
4. Unwanted side effects from specific acute treatments
5. Frequent or excessive use of acute pain medications or acute migraine medications (this can cause medication overuse headache)

People who experience frequent attacks will need more aggressive prevention strategies, which can include non-medication strategies, medications, supplements and neuro-stimulation devices. The best way to make this decision is to speak with your doctor about specific treatment options.

In 2012, the American Headache Society published guidelines outlining [recommendations for migraine prevention medications](#) based on evidence from published studies and clinical experience. Choosing a preventive medication involves balancing how well it works with potential side effects.

When do I take preventive treatment?

Unlike acute treatment, which you take when you feel an attack coming on, a preventive treatment is taken or practiced on a regular basis to help reduce future attacks. Patients typically take their preventive medication daily, although newer injectable treatments can be taken once every 1-3 months. Some medications or supplements may need to be taken twice or even three or four times a day.

It's important to note that doctors (or other providers) generally prescribe a low dose to start and then gradually increase the dose to find the most effective level while minimizing side effects.. The gradual increase means it can be some time before you see the full benefit from taking a preventive treatment. It may take two to four months after reaching "the beneficial dose" before you notice the full decrease in the frequency, severity and duration of attacks.

How do I decide which preventive treatment is right for me?

Preventive treatments can come in the form of medications but vitamins, minerals, and natural product supplements are also frequently used. Lifestyle modifications are also a very important part of prevention. Many different preventive treatments are available, and choosing the one that's best for you depends on many factors, including your other medical conditions. Be sure to discuss with your doctor any health condition that may have an influence on your migraine. Examples include, but are not limited to depression, high blood pressure, seizures, diabetes, menopause, anxiety and asthma. These illnesses may play an important role in choosing the best treatment for you.

All medications have potential side effects, so you should tell your doctor about any unusual symptoms. It is important to discuss potential side effects and how they may be avoided or treated if they appear. Different medications have different safety and cost factors, and these may play a factor in deciding which medication is right for you.

Side effects can often be limited by using low doses, increasing the dose slowly, or allowing time to adjust to the medication. If you are having unwanted side effects, contact your doctor (or other provider) to discuss changes to the treatment plan.

What types of preventive treatments are there?

Preventive treatment can be medications, lifestyle changes and natural supplements, called nutraceuticals. Read more about the types, side effects and considerations of each specific kind of preventive treatment.

Medications

There are several different types of preventive medications available. These include medications that were originally used to treat seizures, anxiety, depression, and high blood pressure. The doses used to treat migraine are often much lower than the originally intended use. OnabotulinumtoxinA and CGRP monoclonal antibodies are also frequently used.

A preventive migraine medication is ideal if you experience more than four migraine attacks per month or if your attacks are very severe. They are taken daily, and usually used in conjunction with acute medications.

Lifestyle Changes

The migraine brain does not like change. Even simple things like changes to a normal routine can lead to a disabling migraine attack. Understanding how lifestyle affects the severity and frequency of attacks can be a large part of successful migraine prevention.

Lifestyle changes that can help prevent migraine attacks include:

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule: Go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day.
- Exercise regularly: For example, an exercise that gets you huffing and puffing for at least 30 minutes three times a week can help reduce frequency or severity of migraine attacks. Always check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- Eat regular meals: Do not skip meals, and eat a good, healthy breakfast.
- Managing stress: Limit the severity of stress by avoiding conflicts and resolving disputes calmly. Some people find it helpful to take a daily "stress break."
- Avoid known triggers: Not everyone has the same triggers, but avoiding your known triggers can help prevent attacks. Not all attacks are triggered so don't feel bad if you can't identify any.
- Stay well hydrated with 5-7 glasses of water a day.
- For some it may be necessary to eliminate caffeine or reduce to two or fewer caffeinated beverages a day.

Nutraceuticals

Nutraceuticals are food-derived products, like vitamin and mineral supplements, that may have a benefit in preventing migraine attacks. Studies have shown that some nutraceuticals are effective and safe for people with migraine, but just because these products are "natural" does not mean they are without risks or side effects. Your doctor (or other provider) is the best resource to help you understand if a specific supplement is right for you.

Common nutraceuticals used as migraine prevention treatments are:

- Magnesium
- Riboflavin
- Co-Enzyme Q10 (CoQ10)
- Feverfew and Butterbur
- Others include niacin, tree bark, lavender, peppermint, and ginkgo biloba, although there is less evidence to prove their effectiveness.

**This information is meant to let you know about your options and help prepare you for conversations with your healthcare provider. Please speak with your healthcare provider to find the right preventive medication for you, or if you're looking to change parts of your migraine management program.*

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The mission of the American Migraine Foundation is to mobilize a community for patient support and advocacy, as well as drive and support impactful research that translates into advances for patients with migraine and other disabling diseases that cause severe head pain. Visit americanmigrainefoundation.org for more resources for people living with migraine and their supporters.

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