

# Understanding Migraine Causes and Treatments

Tony Award winning actress and singer [Kristin Chenoweth is no stranger to migraines](#). She has been living with migraines since she experienced her first episode in a rehearsal room for a Broadway show nearly 25 years ago. Unfortunately, she is in a profession in which she cannot easily avoid her migraine triggers – spotlights, flashing lights, flying, and driving. At times she hasn't been able to perform due to a debilitating migraine.

Chenoweth is not alone. According to the [Migraine Research Foundation](#), 12 percent of the population (including children) suffers from migraine – 18 percent of women in the U.S., six percent of men, and 10 percent of children. Migraines are most common between the ages of 18 and 44.



(Photo © Anh Nguyen – sourced from Unsplash.com)

Migraines are not just bad, throbbing headaches. Symptoms also include nausea/vomiting, dizziness/loss of balance, disturbed vision, fatigue, and sensitivity to light, sounds, and odors.

*Each person's migraine experience is unique, and symptoms can vary with each episode.*

Some people experience intolerable pain that can knock them down for days at a time. Others can muddle through the day. Some migraine sufferers can keep symptoms at bay with medication and lifestyle changes, whereas others continue to suffer episodes despite their best efforts.

### ***Migraine Causes and Treatments***

Like many other chronic health conditions, migraines can be caused by a number of factors working alone or together, so a single solution such as a pill is usually not enough to help most people. Effective treatment requires identifying and addressing whatever is causing the migraines – the root cause(s).

Based on our experience, we have identified four primary causes of migraines, listed below (not necessarily in any order of relevance or frequency):

#### **1. Hormone imbalance**

Many women can time their migraines to a specific point in the menstrual cycle. If this is the case, a dominant hormone could be causing the problem. Taking a prescription migraine medicine or over-the-counter pain reliever merely suppresses the symptoms, leaving the underlying cause untreated.

At BioDesign Wellness Center, we are committed to identifying and treating the root cause of illness. When we suspect a hormone imbalance to be the cause of migraines, we first order lab tests to check hormone levels. Low levels of progesterone or elevated levels of estrogen or testosterone may be the cause. In addition, a hormone imbalance can be related to the liver's

ability to process or discard hormones.

Your liver cleans out the used hormones and in doing so needs to be functioning optimally for good hormone balance. Our patients often report a significant reduction in migraine symptoms (frequency and intensity) after completing their medically supervised liver detox protocol.

## **2. Hypoglycemia**

Many women who suffer with migraine headaches also suffer with *hypoglycemia* (low blood sugar). This can be corrected through diet and supplementation to support healthy blood sugar levels. Finding the cause of the hypoglycemia can reduce suffering in the short and long term. Causes include skipping meals, unrelenting stress, vitamin deficiencies, excess dietary sugar, and excess caffeine.

Hypoglycemia can also result from having a challenged immune system due to autoimmunity, thyroid disorder, or a chronic infection. Lab tests can help to determine if any of these underlying conditions is causing or contributing to the hypoglycemia and thus to the migraines. If they are, we treat these conditions.

## **3. Musculoskeletal tension**

Tight neck muscles can reduce oxygenation to the brain, leading to an alarm response or migraine headache. This is commonly caused when there has been a previous injury, postural change in neck curvature, muscle tension from sitting at desk, or emotional stress. If muscle tension is causing or contributing to the migraines, symptoms may respond well to physical treatments including chiropractic manipulation, acupuncture, and in some cases massage.

#### **4. Environmentally Acquired Illness (EAI)**

EAI most commonly results from exposure to a water damaged building. Toxins from mold forming on wet or damaged building materials are inhaled and absorbed through the skin. The brain is extremely sensitive to mold toxins and becomes inflamed. Most doctors ignore Environmentally Acquired Illness when exploring the cause of migraines, but it is a very important factor to consider.

At BioDesign Wellness Center, [Tampa's leading Functional Medicine practice](#) for the diagnosis and treatment of mold-related illness, we work with you to pinpoint the cause of your migraines and develop a treatment protocol to reduce the frequency and severity of migraines. Treatments may include the following:

- Identifying and addressing any food intolerances
- Detox therapies
- Balancing hormones and blood sugar
- Identifying and treating Environmentally Acquired Illness
- Stress management
- Diagnosing and treating inflammation
- Alleviating muscle tension

Our 360-degree approach, which identifies and treats all factors contributing to migraines, enables patients to reduce their reliance on medications, which merely mask symptoms.

#### ***Self-Help for Migraines***

If you experience migraines, we strongly recommend you schedule an evaluation with a doctor experienced in treating the underlying causes and not merely suppressing the symptoms. Symptoms are your body's cry for help. You don't want to muffle that voice – you instead want to provide your body the help it

needs.

As you seek treatment, there are a few things you can do right now that may help to reduce the frequency or severity of your migraines:

- Find ways to alleviate stress in your life. Stress is a major contributor to numerous health conditions, including migraines.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Both substances are known migraine triggers.
- Try to identify and eliminate any foods or spices that seem to worsen your symptoms, such as processed meats (e.g., pepperoni, hot dogs, lunch meats), aged cheeses, or monosodium glutamate (MSG).
- Don't skip meals. Skipping meals is a common migraine trigger.
- Get sufficient, restful sleep. If you are having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or you wake up tired, consult your doctor for help. Sleep plays a key role in overall health, enabling your body to rest and heal itself. For more on this, see our recent post, [Detox in Your Sleep with Proper Sleep Hygiene](#).

Most importantly, don't give up in your search for effective treatment. Just because medical treatments haven't provided the relief you expected is no reason to believe that effective treatments aren't available. Find a doctor who is persistent in digging deep to find and treat the root cause(s) of your migraines.

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