

# MIGRAINE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

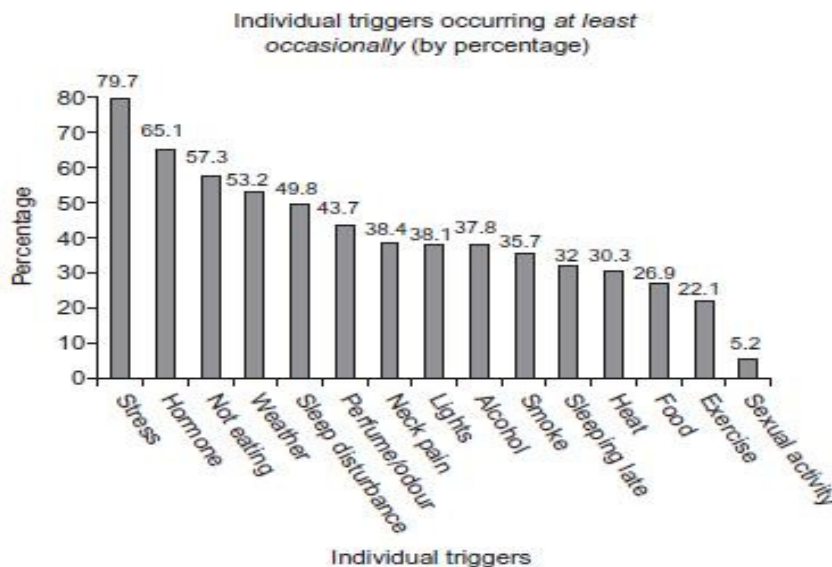
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## Top festive headache triggers

The Migraine Research Institute has compiled beneficial guidelines for headaches sufferers this festive season. These guidelines are based on a study published in *Cephalalgia* November 2007, The International Journal for Headache. The aim of this study was to evaluate and define triggers for headache sufferers, so that they could reduce them and improve their quality of life.

Dr Elliot Shevel the chairman of the South African Headache Society explains “One thousand two hundred and seven migraine patients were evaluated at The Headache Centre of Atlanta, a clinical practice in the USA. The graph below shows the results of this study.”



Guidelines for headache sufferers:

Headache trigger: Stress

Summer can also be a very stressful time, thanks to large family gatherings over the festive season, and stress is a major headache trigger. Headache and migraine sufferers should try to manage stress and plan ahead of time for big family get-togethers and holidays to avoid tension headaches. For example, try to avoid last minute gift shopping, ensure your car is serviced before travelling, delegate chores to family members, and make travel reservations well in advance.

### Headache trigger: Hormones

Hormones that are introduced into the body may also trigger headache. A big trigger of hormonal headache for many women is oral contraceptives. Either by going onto the pill or even going off of it. This applies to the same thing with birth control patches. Of course, there are two solutions to this - stay off them, or stay on them.

### Headache trigger: Not eating

Eat balanced meals three times a day with healthy snacks in between to make sure your body gets the nutrients and energy it needs. Hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) can also trigger headaches in many people. If a meal with high sugar content is eaten, it can cause a rapid rise in blood sugar levels followed by a fast drop that may trigger a headache. Eating a meal with low sugar content may prevent the onset of a headache during the day. Call us on 0861 678 911 for a list of foods which have a low glycemic index. Remember that skipping meals is a sure-fire trigger for headaches. Eat in moderation and enjoy your meals.

### Headache trigger: Weather

If you think pressure changes are a trigger for you, try keeping a diary of weather changes and headache pain. For this you'll want to get a decent barometer. This is not a trigger that sufferers can control, they are advised to contact a specialist to diagnose why they are experiencing these headaches.

### Headache trigger: Sleep disturbances/ sleeping late

A recent study published in the *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, tested 32 women with tension-type headache. The investigators studied self-report data on headache triggers, pain interference with sleep, and self-management strategies for pain. 81% reported that going to sleep was the most frequently used self-management strategy, and this group also rated going to sleep as the most effective strategy. So don't lose out on sleep. Fatigue is a major trigger of headaches as well, aim to sleep seven or eight hours a night.

### Headache trigger: Perfume/ Odours

People who are sensitive to fragrances and/ other odours should bear this in mind when shopping for sunscreen, insect repellent, and other summer products. Seek those that are fragrance free and ask a pharmacist for advice if necessary.

### Headache trigger: Neck pain/ Exercise

Learn the right stretching exercises to stretch the muscles of your head, face, neck and jaw. Stretching should be gentle and soothing, not agonizingly painful. Stretch your neck and jaw muscles carefully and you will get results.



#### Headache trigger: Bright light

It's not only the heat, but bright sunlight will often trigger headaches. Many headache and migraine sufferers are sensitive to bright light and avoid it when they have a headache. It is wise to wear sunglasses for protection. Polarized lenses are recommended, as they are effective in cutting out glare. A suitable hat may also be helpful.

#### Headache trigger: Alcohol

Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol leads to dehydration. Headache sufferers should try not to drink liquor if it is a trigger to their headache. If they do have a drink, ensure that they drink plenty of water during and following a session of indulgence. At least one glass of water to each glass of alcohol is advisable.

#### Headache trigger: Smoke

Smoking and second-hand smoke from cigarettes, cigars and pipes can contribute to headaches for both the smoker and the non-smoker. Nicotine, one of the components of tobacco, stimulates the blood vessels in the brain to constrict (narrow). Smoking also stimulates the nerves in the back of the throat, contributing to headache pain. Usually, by removing the stimulus (nicotine), headaches will be relieved. Quitting smoking or reducing exposure to second-hand smoke is especially helpful for those with a cluster headaches. According to a study on WebMD of the people with cluster headaches, those who reduced their tobacco use by less than one-half pack of cigarettes per day found their headaches decreased by 50%. Allergy to smoke as well as odor sensitivity can also cause migraine headaches in some people. By avoiding situations or places where smoking occurs, headaches may be avoided.

#### Headache trigger: Heat

If you suffer from migraines, hot weather may not be your best friend, as heat can be a trigger. It is a highly uncomfortable sensation. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids, but avoid those with caffeine or alcohol. They can cause you to become more dehydrated. If you must be outdoors, wear a broad brimmed hat and make sure to use plenty of sunblock. It's a good idea to only exercise in the early morning or late in the evening when it's cooler.

### Headache trigger: Food

Dietary headache is a common affliction. These are usually triggered by foods that assist with energy such as caffeine and chocolate. Take note of which foods that trigger headaches for you by keeping a diary and avoid these foods. A Dietary Trigger Diary is available at [www.headacheclinic.co.za](http://www.headacheclinic.co.za) free of charge to assist you.

### Headache trigger: Sexual Activity

For years headaches were an excuse one's partner used when they weren't in the mood, but for some this is not a joke. Sex-related headaches are severe and often don't give warning when they are about to come about. Sex headaches have been portrayed as 'a thunderclap' which often develops in the base of the skull at or near the moment of orgasm. This in turn transforms the satisfaction into anguish in seconds. The intense pain has been known to last for about 10 to 15 minutes, with a dull pain with less intensity lasting for about hour or two.

According to leading specialists this condition is more prominent in men than in women. They account for about 80% of the cases, but there is no evidence to why this happens. Many sufferers develop a lasting fear of sex and this can cause substantial psychological problems. For some it gets so bad that they are afraid that they will never have sex again. Sufferers should consult with a specialist who will be able to diagnose why they are experiencing these headaches.

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