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Caring for Your Headaches **SMART Lifestyle Changes**

Making SMART lifestyle changes will reduce headaches. These are key steps to managing headaches. Patients who make these changes will need less medicine and the medicines they take will work better.

Sleep Well

- Make sure to get 8.5 to 9 hours of sleep each night and avoid taking naps during the day. Deep nighttime sleep will allow the nervous system to reset and recharge overnight, making pain less likely to occur.
- Avoid using electronics 30-60 minutes before bed. Exposure to lights can prevent the release of melatonin, the brain chemical that allows you to fall asleep.

Meals and Fluids

- Plan to eat something every 3 ½ hours and to include a healthy snack (whole grain toast or a low sugar cereal) at bedtime. Skipping meals leaves your blood sugar low and your body tired, making you more likely to get a headache.
- Eat a healthy diet by working to substitute whole grains for white flour and fruits for sugar. Avoid packaged foods and fast food whenever possible.
- Aim for 8 glasses or 4 (16.9 oz.) water bottles a day. Many people do not drink enough and are dehydrated. If you are in pain, dehydration makes pain signals stronger.

Activity

- Move for at least one hour each day. Exercise causes our body to release lots of anti-pain and anti-inflammatory signals. The benefits can be long lasting when done regularly. Exercise also promotes the release of chemicals in the body connected to happiness.
- Remember to walk fast, take the steps, or ride a bike whenever possible to release a burst of pain fighting, mood lifting chemicals.

Relax

- Learn relaxation strategies. Keeping the nervous system relaxed and happy using deep breathing and other relaxation strategies can help bring and keep pain down while training your mind to better respond to pain signals.
- Do not be afraid of the pain. Let the pain be an experience that provides opportunity for growth and strength. Know that it will stop in time, but do not let it stop you from life.

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Triggers

- When you get a migraine, write down what may have triggered it. Any type of stress can cause your nervous system to be sensitive to an attack. The stress can be physical (illness, injury, blood sugar changes, dehydration, weather, menstrual cycle or hormonal changes, eye strain, toxins, foods or food additives, obesity, sleep apnea), mental (concentration), or emotional (positive or negative).

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