

MIGRAINES: A Real Headache to Treat

A couple of years ago my old scout troop was in a bind and needed an additional adult for a weekend backpack trip into the Cascades, so I was volunteered.

After dinner the adults were all sitting around the campfire relaxing when one of the boys came running up. "Dr. Capon", he said "You need to do something, Jimmy (not his real name) just "Ralfed" all over our tent." "Ralfed" is the medical term used by preadolescent boys to denote violent gastrointestinal distress followed by nausea and vomiting.

Upon investigation I found that Jimmy was experiencing a migraine, and had a history of them. Like Jimmy about a quarter of the population suffers from migraines. These are recurrent attacks where the sufferer experiences a pounding, often (but not exclusively) one sided attack. Attacks are often preceded by a prodrome of visual or emotional disturbances, accompanied by nausea, and gastrointestinal disturbances. Following an attack most patients are drowsy.

In a migraine the blood vessels to the head initially constrict and then soon dilate allowing blood to pool in the head, causing migraine symptoms. Treatment of migraines by Naturopathic Physicians is different from Allopathic (orthodox M.D.'s) Physicians. Other doctors primarily use pain killers to suppress or mask the symptoms. Naturopathic Physicians may also use analgesics (pain relieving medicines) during an attack, but our focus is on treating the cause not just treating the symptoms.

The causes of migraine vary from patient to patient

There are several major therapeutic considerations:

Dietary: There is little doubt that a major cause of migraine headache is food allergy/intolerance. This has been demonstrated by careful, double blind, placebo studies. Removal of allergic/intolerant foods has demonstrated a success rate of 70-93% depending on the study.

Physical Medicine: Many physical medicine treatments (manipulation, massage, electrical modalities) have been used and shown effective in shortening the duration of migraines, but they are ineffective in preventing this problem. They have great promise however in the muscular component of other types of headache (Tension, Cluster, Stress induced, etc.)

Botanical Medicine: Botanical medicines will be the wonder drugs of the next century for migraine sufferers. There are several effective botanical medicines that can be taken both to treat and prevent migraines. One of these natural medicines (Tanacetum parthenium) was used in a double blind study at the London Migraine clinic and reported in the British Medical Journal to have been effective as a preventative in over 70% of the 270 patients studied.

Detoxification: Least we forget, should one be constipated or if the liver is not functioning optimally we become toxic. Especially when people consume coffee, alcohol, pesticides, chlorine and other chemicals in our in our food and water. Don't forget environmental exposures at work and the like.

The key to a permanent solution to any medical problem, migraines included, is not to suppress the symptoms but rather to treat the cause. Pain is a danger signal from the body that something is wrong. If the oil light on your cars dash comes on you could do one of two things: 1) Pull over and put in some oil, or 2) spray paint over the oil light to temporarily remove the irritation. Masking the bodies pain is like the second option. You are not treating the cause, only the symptoms.

Little Jimmy, well for him I filled a container with the hottest water he could stand and we put his feet in it. This caused the blood vessels in his feet to enlarge and the blood pooled there. We also used cold packs to the back of his head to shrink the swollen vessels and help drive the blood to his feet. He said after 10 minutes that three quarters of the pain was gone. Later with the help of some natural remedies he was able to sleep soundly until the next morning.