

Can natural remedies bring an end to migraines?

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Hannah Charman, [Physic Health](#), discusses the causes and treatment for migraines with a specific focus on natural remedies

[Migraines](#) affect around 1 in 7 people in the UK and are much more common in women than men. Although there are several causes, very often female sufferers notice that migraines are linked to hormone changes from puberty onwards. These migraines can be extremely debilitating, leading to several days a month in bed, and up to 25 million days are lost from work or school each year due to migraine. Symptoms include crippling headaches, nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light, making it impossible to carry on with normal life during a bad attack.

Herbal medicine for migraines

Over the past 20 years, I've treated hundreds of women for migraines using Western Herbal Medicine. In most cases, herbal treatment has been quick and effective, although results do vary between patients. As a Medical Herbalist, my approach is to try and establish the underlying causes of the migraines, and address those not just with herbal medicine, but simple changes to diet and lifestyle too. This combination works extremely well and helps patients to feel more in control over what's happening.

Very often there's a strong hormonal component, so I can use herbs which contain phytosterols to help restore hormone balance. Phyto-sterols have a hormonal action on the body, strong enough to make a difference, but gentle enough not to have the side effects that women worry about with oral contraceptives or HRT. Where stress is a contributing factor, I have a different group of herbs which work directly on the nervous system and help the body out of its stress response even when stress triggers are ongoing. Some of my herbs can be used to work on the liver and other eliminatory organs which help to clear used hormones.

Finally, there are herbs like Feverfew and Alecost which are specifically used to prevent and treat migraines. By blending these kinds of herbs together in the right amounts, the patient has a personalised medicine perfect for their needs. This is very different to the kind of treatment offered by mainstream medicine, but the two can work alongside each other quite happily if needed.

If you suffer from debilitating migraines, it's well worth seeing a Medical Herbalist for help. I see each of my patients for an hour to begin with, which allows time for me to get to fully understand what's going on and which treatments would be most suitable. Where appropriate, I recommend working with other practitioners such as Osteopaths, but usually the treatments I offer get good results by themselves.

Please be aware that Herbal Medicine is an unregulated profession, so check out the training and qualifications of any practitioner you're thinking of working with. Also check for membership of governing bodies, and their insurance. Members of the National Institute of Medical Herbalists (NIMH) and College of Practitioners of Phytotherapy (CPP) are trained over a number of years and competent to practice. You can find your nearest NIMH member at www.nimh.org.uk

Other causes and treatments

I've met a number of patients who've suffered migraines following a head or spinal injury. Very often these people do well with **craniosacral** therapy, osteopathic, or chiropractic treatments. Likewise, many report a significant improvement following a daith piercing. Daith piercing is where a specific point in the cartilage of the ear is pierced, and a stud or ring put in. Although a number of people have reported getting relief from their migraines following after getting this piercing, we don't currently understand why, and there are no studies to measure their efficacy.

Migraines, like most chronic health problems, benefit from a truly holistic approach and in my clinic we explore the psychological and emotional elements as well as the physical ones. This not only helps to treat the underlying causes, but helps the person to feel as if they're doing more to help themselves, and puts them back in control over what's happening. If migraines are making your life a misery, and you're not getting the relief you need elsewhere, western herbal medicine is an option well worth exploring.



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