

# Headaches

A GUIDE TO NATURAL PAIN RELIEF



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# Introduction

## WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE HELP

Headaches are a common problem in our world today. They look different for every individual, and most of us have been impacted by one at some point. Headaches may be an occasional nuisance, or they may be a regular occurrence. No matter your situation, a headache can definitely get in the way of daily activities - working on the computer, driving the kids to practice, or enjoying time with your family. There are tons of over-the-counter medications to treat headaches. The problem is that they all come with their own side effects. Not only that, but they do nothing to prevent future headaches from cropping up and spoiling your day.

Our goal with this guide is to offer you an alternative solution - some drug-free options to reduce pain and inflammation, while simultaneously working to achieve better health from the inside out. Our mission is to help our community achieve freedom through health. We envision a future where people are not defined by their health challenges, but instead, understand and celebrate the body's unique ability to heal itself. We aim to be a resource for the Orlando community on natural health, alternative medicine, and whole body wellness.

*Dr. Andrew Kalis*

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# Water

Approximately seventy-five percent of Americans do not drink enough water daily. Studies show that chronic dehydration is a common cause of tension headaches and migraines. You can avoid dehydration by drinking water throughout the day and eating water-rich foods like strawberries, watermelon, and tomatoes. Aim to drink **half of your body weight in ounces** of water per day. For example, a person who weighs 100 lbs should aim to drink 50 oz of water per day, at minimum.





# Ginger Tea

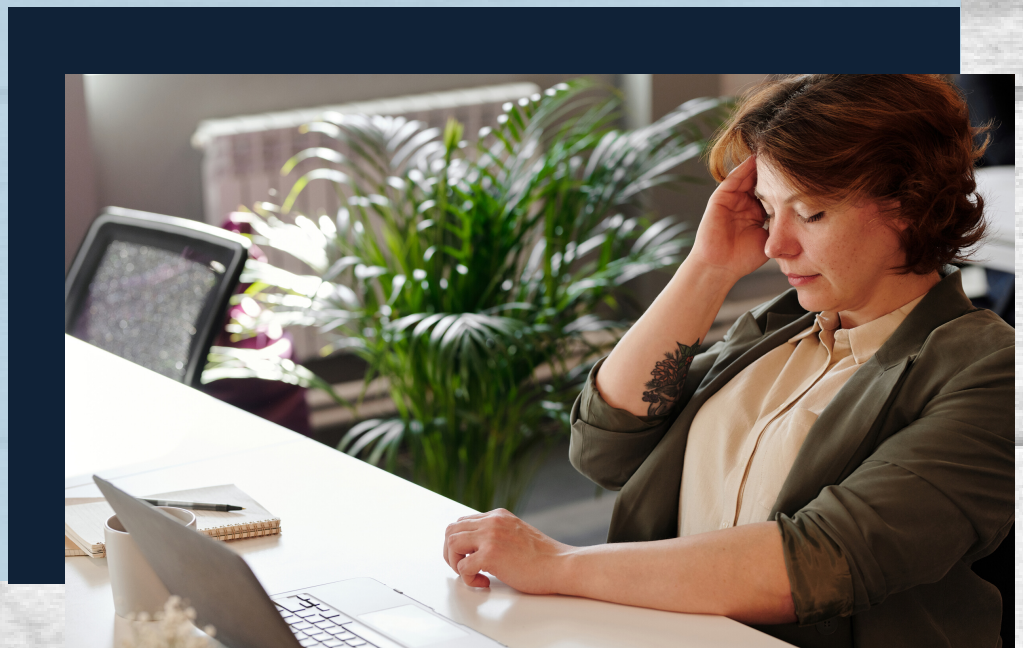
Ginger is most commonly known for its calming effects on the stomach and the digestive system. However, ginger can also be very effective in treatment and management of migraines. According to one study, ginger **performed as well** as one of the leading prescription migraine medications (Sumatriptan) with fewer negative side effects. Ginger contains more than 200 substances in its oils and it seems to have anti-inflammatory, anti-nausea, and antihistamine effects. Ginger is commonly added to tea, but it is also available in gel or capsule form as a supplement.





# Magnesium

Magnesium is an essential mineral that our bodies need to function properly. One of its many functions is to help regulate the **nervous system**, which is comprised of the brain, the spinal cord, and the spinal nerves. The nerves are responsible for sending pain signals throughout the body, so it makes sense that low magnesium has been linked to frequent headaches and migraines. Ensure you get a proper dose of magnesium through your diet, or consider adding a magnesium supplement to your vitamin regiment.



# Caffeine

Caffeine is a natural stimulant most commonly found in tea, coffee, and cacao plants. It works by **stimulating the brain and the central nervous system**, helping you stay alert and prevent the onset of tiredness. Caffeine can be an effective way to relieve headache and migraine pain and can even serve as an antioxidant. In fact, medications such as Excedrin and Excedrin Extra Strength actually have caffeine within them to help to decrease or eliminate migraines! A word of caution when it comes to caffeine, if caffeine intake becomes too high a person may experience withdrawal symptoms which also include headaches.





# Cold Compress

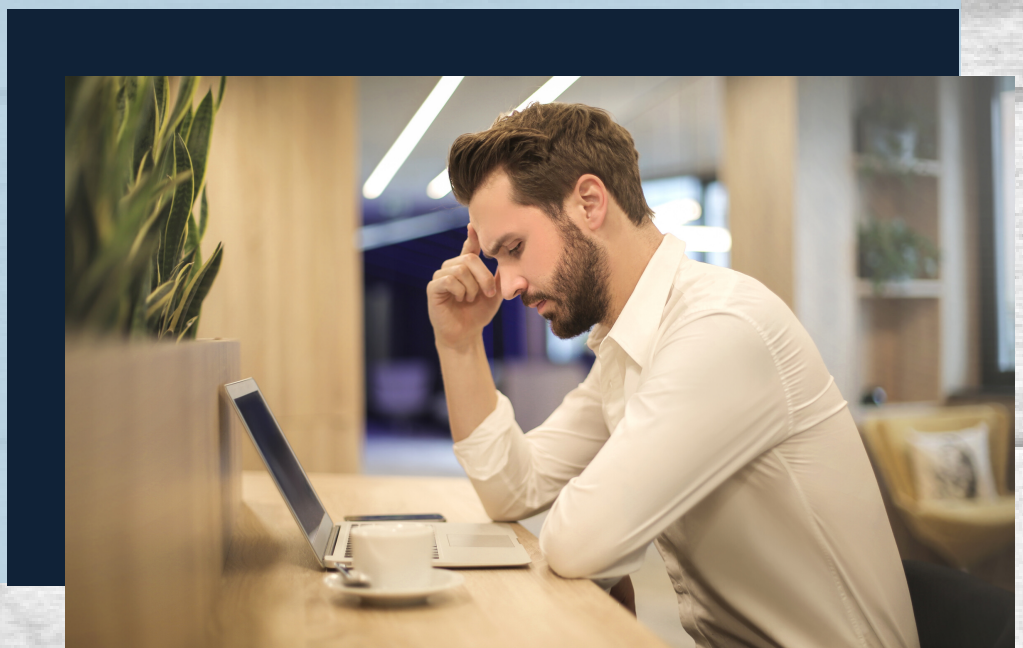
Cold therapy is one of the oldest home remedies for migraines, although no one really knows why it works. Few studies have been done to actually understand the effects of cold on headache pain. Cold constricts the blood vessels which decreases blood flow (called **vasoconstriction**) which may reduce inflammation and lessen pain. Cold temperatures can also slow nerve conduction, so you feel less pain because the nerves are slower to deliver the pain signals to the brain. Cold packs should be placed on the forehead or temples and should be rotated on and off every fifteen minutes.





# Warm Compress

Though it may seem counterintuitive to the last tip, heat therapy actually works better for some people than cold therapy. Heat stimulates nerve endings called thermoreceptors, which may block the pain signals to the brain. Heat also increases blood flow to the area and relaxes muscles, so heat can be an excellent treatment for tension headaches. In fact, a majority of headaches can be traced back to tension in the neck muscles. At the base of the skull, there is a group of muscles called the **suboccipital muscles**, which control movement of the skull and upper two vertebrae in the neck. Tension in these often-used muscles can cause swelling that compresses the spinal nerves, leading to intense headaches. Heat packs should be placed on the neck and at the base of the skull, and should be rotated on and off every fifteen minutes.



# Peppermint

Studies have shown that peppermint oil can be **more effective** for topical use (applied to the skin) than over the counter forms of pain blockers such as Aspirin and Acetaminophen. Peppermint can assist in soothing sore muscles most commonly associated with tension-type headaches. To help your muscles relax, try rubbing a solution of peppermint oil diluted in either almond or grapeseed oil onto your temples, forehead, or back of the head under the hairline, for immediate relief.





# Lavender

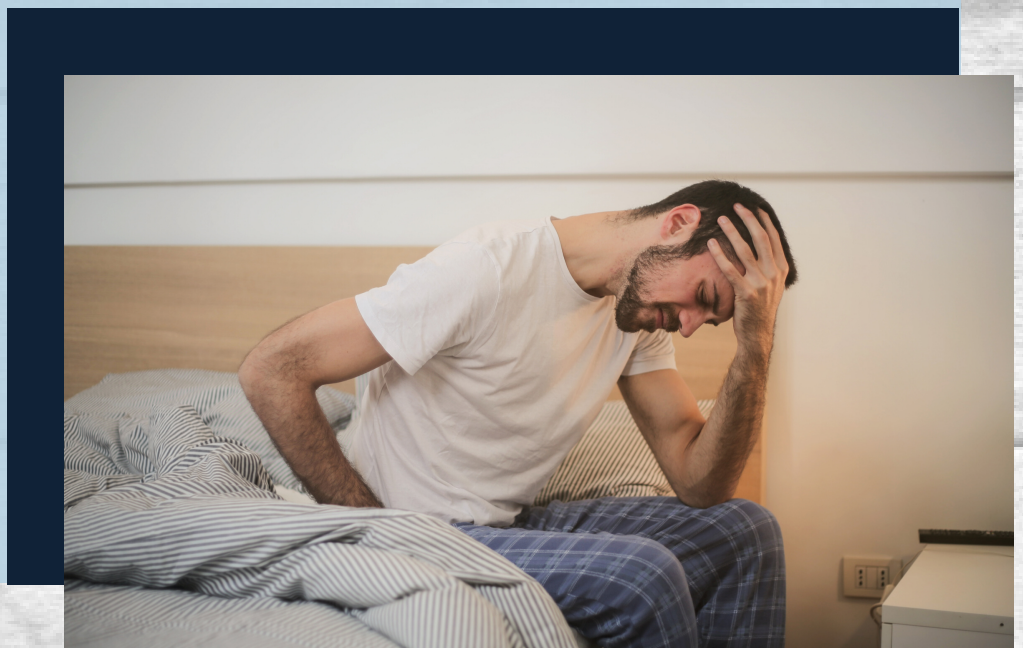
Lavender oil is an essential oil with a high concentration liquid containing aromatic compounds. It's commonly used for stress relief and relaxation. There is also strong evidence that it can help to manage and treat headaches and migraines. One study found that people reported a **significant reduction** in migraine pain after only fifteen minutes of inhaling the lavender oil. To inhale the benefits of lavender oil, use an oil diffuser, and dilute the lavender oil in water. Alternatively, you can apply lavender oil directly to the skin (using the same techniques as peppermint oil) or you can add lavender oil to a warm bath to reduce muscle tension at the same time.





# Sleep

Sleep is essential and necessary for a healthy lifestyle. The body uses sleep as a way to process all of the **thoughts, emotions, and sensory information** that the brain receives throughout the day. When you deprive the body of sleep, it can lead to headaches for some people. Accordingly to the American Migraine Foundation, sleep loss and oversleeping are common headache triggers. It is recommended to sleep between seven and eight hours per night for improved overall body function. When naps are necessary, aim to sleep between twenty to forty-five minutes to avoid waking in the middle of an REM cycle and feeling more tired as a result.



# Chiropractic Care

Many headaches actually originate from **tension in the upper neck**. As you go throughout your day, sitting at a desk, using repetitive motions, or standing with poor posture, your spinal bones move naturally to support your structure. When the spinal bones shift out of their proper alignment, the muscles around the spinal bones tense up in order to protect that interior structure of the nervous system. This misalignment of the vertebrae is called a **subluxation**, and the swelling associated with this misalignment can often cause the spinal nerves to become restricted. This can lead to many symptoms including headaches, migraines, allergies, dizziness, and even ear infections. A chiropractor uses **gentle, specific adjustments** to realign the vertebrae and relax the muscles, which relieves the pressure on the nerves and reduces symptoms. If you are nervous about the physicality of chiropractic care, look for a chiropractor certified in Torque Release Technique. This technique utilizes a tool called the Integrator, so the adjustment is both gentle and effective, with no twisting or "popping" sounds. Chiropractic care can help to resolve an existing headache and even prevent future headaches by reducing the stress on the body's nervous system.





# When to Get Help

**You should seek guidance from a trusted professional when:**

1. You have two or more headaches per week, for two or more weeks per month. (Four or more headache days per month.)
2. You experience interruptions in your daily activities including sleeping, exercising, driving a car, focusing, using a computer, or interacting with family.
3. You experience additional symptoms including dizziness, fatigue, nausea, anxiety, depression, mood swings, sensitivity to light or sound, or changes in vision.
4. You experience changes in your headaches - lasting longer, more intense pain, or development into migraine headaches.





# Resources

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