

## YOU TELL THEM: IT'S IN THEIR HEAD

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# Migraine Headache

### ROSANNA'S STORY

"I was 15 when I got my first migraine headache. It was like living out my worst nightmare. The headache would start over my left eye, spread to my temple in about an hour or two, and in six hours it would reach my neck. Once the headache got to the base of my head, there was no stopping it."

Experience taught Rosanna that the six hours it took for the headache to progress from just over her left eye to the base of her neck, were all the time she had left to get things done. In her words, "Whatever I had to do, I had only six hours to do it in, because I spent the next one- to three-days away from the human race, in hell."

Experience taught me that once the headache started, there was one thing to do: lie totally still on my back in a dark room, until the headache went away. If I lifted my head or even rolled over, severe nausea would come over me. At that point, the only relief I could think of was death." Her description goes on. "Any noise hurt so much that no torture devised by man could be worse."

### MIGRAINE: A MODERN FRONTIER

Every day you can witness miracles in any modern hospital. Kidney transplants have become routine; heart, lung and liver transplants are regular procedures; and as I write this, over ten complete intestinal tracts have been transplanted in Pittsburgh alone. A quintuple by-pass—that's five arteries transplanted—is so routine, it's not treated as special. Over 90 percent of people who undergo such spectacular surgery recover from the surgery. Think of it like this: Suppose you had been a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School in 1900 and died at that time. Then, suppose you could somehow return to watch these medical procedures take place today. Many of them would seem almost magical. They would compare in outcome to the miracles in the New Testament. Infections that, in 1900, had been fatal and without hope, are now routinely knocked out with an antibiotic. Instead of dying, the patient goes back to work in a few days. What you then knew as a hopelessly demented person confined to an institution, now only needs to take a drug twice daily and they look, act, and work like any normal person. There are many of these people in all walks of life.

However, in spite of these miraculous accomplish meets, we still can't eliminate migraine headaches. This seems incongruous in comparison to the miracles of surgery, and our ability to defeat infection, control high blood pressure, and manic depression. After all, a headache, even a migraine headache, seems mundane compared to these other illnesses. But that's how it is with migraines. There's a lot of help available for its victims, but most of the help deals with fighting its symptoms and not stopping the cause.

### WHAT'S A MIGRAINE?

Rosanna described it in her own words, as well as any medical manual could. "A migraine usually starts around the eye and progresses in three- to six-hours to the entire head, down to the neck. Once established over the head, the headache lasts 24 to 72 hours. A migraine can include nausea and sometimes vomiting, but the nausea is severe and vomiting isn't a relief like in stomach upset. A migraine sufferer naturally seeks seclusion while the headache is in progress and usually learns, on their own, to lie completely still in a dark, quiet room until the headache goes away. If it lasts three days, that means three days in a noiseless, dark room!"

Migraine headaches are caused by a disturbance of cranial circulation. In other words, circulation in the skull is disturbed. Blood vessels in the scalp dilate and they cause the generalized head pain. Since nausea occurs with the slightest movement, you can guess that the inner-ear balance center is either directly or indirectly involved.

While nausea is a routine symptom, other symptoms are not consistent. Migraine sufferers often see flashes of light, and straight lines will appear wavy. So the visual centers are also involved. Hands and feet often become cold and the victim will feel chilled, even in warm weather many migraine sufferers become hypersensitive to the slightest noise that most of us wouldn't even notice. Noise becomes an extremely painful event for them.

Of the eight-million migraine sufferers in the United States, three times as many of them are women as men. Over 50 percent of people, men or women, who get migraines, have a family history of them (usually a parent). Consequently, there's a genetic predisposition to migraines, even if they aren't absolutely inherited. Of women who get them, over 60 percent relate them to their menstrual cycle. This means that they often precede menses. These women are also likely to have irregular periods. However, the migraines are not confined to the menstrual cycle. It's just the most likely time for them to occur.

Of the 60 percent of women who relate migraines to their menstrual cycle, most of them noticed that their migraines don't occur during pregnancy. This observation, and the fact that the migraines disappear altogether around menopause, suggests a strong hormonal relationship. Some researchers believe that drastic changes in hormonal balance cause these women to get migraines. In other words, it's not the absolute levels of hormones; it's the balance of one to the other. This also invokes stress as a factor, because these hormonal changes are a severe stress on the body.

Women who get migraines usually grow out of them by about the age of 50, during menopause. This signals a hormonal involvement. As you read on, you'll see that there is some evidence that migraines act like an inflammatory illness in some people. If it is inflammatory, it's reasonable to expect a hormonal involvement, similar to rheumatoid arthritis.

Other recent research strongly suggests that some migraines are an inflammatory disease. You could think of them as a form of arthritis. For this reason, anti inflammatory drugs, such as Ponstel, that inhibit prostaglandin PGE2, bring some relief. Other research shows that EPA causes the body to produce prostaglandin PGE3, which helps relieve migraines. PGE2 aggravates inflammation, and PGE3 modulates it.

Folklore had taught that an herb, feverfew, relieved migraine headaches. An English medical group conducted a clinical study and confirmed the folk wisdom. This finding

supports the inflammatory nature, because feverfew interferes with the body's production of PGE2.

In support of the inflammatory nature of migraines, research in England, Italy, the United States, and a few other countries has shown that migraines are triggered in some people by selective foods. Foods that consistently trigger migraines are chocolate, cheese, and those rich in monosodium glutamate, MSG. Red wine also initiates migraines. However, not all migraines are triggered by food or wine. All people recognize stress as a cause of migraines, so both observations, food and stress, fit the inflammatory pattern very well.

So, although the cause of migraines is unknown, both personal experience and research point to the pattern of an inflammatory disease. Even if the cause of migraines is unknown, much of the statistics suggest a dietary, stress-related, hormonal-balance pattern. One thing is certain, when a migraine comes on, it's terrible. Let me return to Rosanna.

### BACK TO ROSANNA

Rosanna's mother had suffered from migraines, albeit not as severely as Rosanna. Consequently, Rosanna searched for a doctor who could treat her for them even if they couldn't make them go away. Like most migraine sufferers, she went to any doctor she thought could help, including medical doctors who specialized in neurologic disorders, chiropractors, osteopaths, and others.

Depending on the doctor's specialty, she was told that her migraines were caused by her menstrual cycle, because she was irregular; heredity, because her mother had them; and the permanent stress from an auto accident she had at age 19, even if the accident occurred four years after her first migraine started.

Rosanna's parents sent her to a pain clinic in Michigan. Here she learned how to live with migraines and why she must lie still in a quiet and dark place while going through the attack. She tried yoga, physical therapy, and anything she thought would help. Rosanna's experience proves the observation, quite clearly, that, after all is said and done, migraine sufferers are really on their own.

By noting when, how, and under what circumstances the migraines started, Rosanna learned that hers could be caused by stress, either good or bad. In other words, an uplifting, happy day could bring one on as well as a bad, tension-filled day. Other things that triggered the migraines were: a major shift in the weather pattern, when the barometric pressure changes dramatically; a day filled with taxing mental or physical work; a chill, especially on her neck where she was hurt in the auto accident; too much sun; fumes from automobile exhaust, such as during a bad traffic tie-up.

As an aside, all these environmental triggers indicate an inflammatory pattern. The neck injury is similar to the person with rheumatoid arthritis who had an old joint injury. It all fits. Rosanna could protect herself from most of these things. For example, wear a scarf around her neck, have her auto gas pumped by an attendant, be sure to go easy with physical work, and don't get too enthusiastic or overly involved in group activities. Rosanna was also careful to avoid the foods that trigger migraines. However, some things were unavoidable like her period, changes in the weather, some foods, and an occasional bad day.

A big step to deal with emotionally was getting married. She and her husband-to-be prepared the wedding very carefully and proved what determined people can accomplish if they really try. They selected a wedding date that she felt would fall between migraines and then deliberately planned everything, so as the wedding date approached, nothing would surface unexpectedly. This planning avoided the stress normally associated with weddings. It worked. Rosanna made it through the wedding and honeymoon without a migraine. This is proof of how well she had learned to schedule her life around this terrible affliction and handle situations that arose.

Rosanna and her husband were blessed with two children. Not only did Rosanna experience the joy of motherhood, but pregnancy brought complete freedom from migraines. In her own words: "I asked myself, are they over for good?" Within 30-days after she stopped nursing the baby, a migraine reared its ugly head. She said it nicely: "I realized I couldn't always be pregnant or nursing, but it was nice to have the relief for awhile."

Her obstetrician was impressed by her pregnancy experience, so he tried giving her a drug he used for women with another disorder, endometriosis. Unfortunately, the drug didn't work, but her doctor's intentions were good and he, at least, could put one idea to rest.

Although Rosanna and her husband had learned to live with her migraines and were doing fine at raising two children, the migraines were a terrible drag. They were like a spectre hanging over everything they did and required careful thought and planning for even the slightest outing. For this reason, they never stopped searching for some way to prevent the migraines.

Both Rosanna and her husband attended many seminars. At one nutrition seminar a Shaklee distributor spoke of a migraine sufferer who had been helped by nutritional supplements. About two weeks after the seminar, Rosanna got a real bad 72-hour migraine. Her husband called the Shaklee distributor and said: "We want to try some products."

She started with a modest program that included Instant Protein, Vita-Lea, B-Complex, EPA, and Herb-Lax. Just eight days later, they got bad news and good news. The bad news: Rosanna got a migraine. The good news: It lasted only two and a half hours! If this relief was going to last, it sounded too easy. Her first thought was that it was in her head. She would gladly settle for a severe two and a half hour headache every eight to ten days. For Rosanna, that would be miraculous. Her husband wouldn't let her back down on the program. He kept her going to see what would evolve.

Another part of Rosanna's story is constipation. It cleared up when she started her Shaklee program. Since Rosanna started her program, she has spoken to many groups of migraine sufferers and noticed that most of them have bowel irregularity in the form of constipation. One can speculate on how constipation could aggravate a migraine in the same way it aggravates asthma. Hopefully, researchers will shed more light on this relationship in the future.

Rosanna related the following story: "I kept the program going. I mixed Meal Shakes with Instant Protein and increased all my supplements. I waited 30 days, two months, then ten months. No more migraines! This was a miracle to me."

It's now been over four years since Rosanna has had a migraine. She's careful not to get chills, manages the external

stress in her life, and doesn't overwork and get tired. As an Italian, she still loves some provolone cheese now and then, but she otherwise follows a strict nutrition program which includes four basic supplements: B-Complex, EPA, calcium-magnesium, and alfalfa. She also uses Vita-Lea, Vita-C, and other products, but the big four are her basics.

If she feels a headache starting, she doubles or even triples up on the big four. Around her periods, which are irregular and are preceded by two days of cramping, she routinely doubles up on her supplements without even thinking about it. Her commitment to a careful lifestyle and this nutrition program prevents the headache from starting.

Ask Rosanna if she feels she has found a cure and you'll get a surprising answer. "No! I'll always be a migraine sufferer." This plan isn't a cure; it's only what it takes to prevent them from getting started. At her request, the gynecologist, who helped her as much as he could, gave her a thorough examination. He also did a complete review of her medical history, including the migraines, once again. His conclusion: "Keep up what you're doing. It's drug free and it works. We don't have a better plan."

#### IS IT IN HER HEAD?

I guess migraines are always in your head, but Rosanna has learned how to keep them out of her head. Her program, even though she came upon it by trial and error, makes scientific sense. B-Complex in large doses helps to improve circulation to the extremities, including the head. Most folks who don't get migraines observe this circulation effect as improved fingernail growth. EPA helps increase the body's production of prostaglandin PGE3. This prostaglandin reduces an inflammatory response. This effect has been confirmed in a number of excellent clinical studies. EPA forms the basis of a previous book I wrote entitled *The Arthritis Relief Diet*. This diet is a plan to reduce inflammation, because a complete diet with supplements is far more powerful than supplements alone.

Alfalfa helps reduce Rosanna's sinus congestion, which is another inflammatory response. The fiber in alfalfa, specifically the saponins in the fiber, bind antagonists produced in the liver and excreted through the gall bladder. Saponins remove them where they enter the gastrointestinal tract, so they're eliminated totally. As a woman, Rosanna needs more calcium, and there have been hypotheses that migraines can even be precipitated by inadequate magnesium.

Magnesium is a nutrient, usually short in the diet, that has a very important role in health. I like to say it's an "unsung hero." Other supplements Rosanna uses simply improve her general health. And the healthier her body is, the better it will deal with stress, whether it be physical or mental.

#### PHYLLIS

"You say a broken back was a blessing in disguise?" I asked. "Look," she continued, "you don't need to be smart all your life. Just once will do." Phyllis' life had been miserable until shortly after that fateful day when she was hit by a New Orleans' streetcar. I'd better digress a little.

Phyllis lived in New Orleans. She was troubled with migraine headaches about twice a month and couldn't eat when she had them. In fact, she represents another group of migraine sufferers: those who become somewhat anorexic. They aren't necessarily anorexic people, it's just that the

migraines seem to start them in that direction. Perhaps the intense nausea that comes with migraines, or the recognition, even subconsciously, that some foods trigger the headaches, causes these people to become anorexic. You don't need a degree in clinical psychology to see that either nausea or the idea that food causes migraines could create an aversion to food. Just reread how Rosanna described the headaches.

So besides the migraines, poor nutrition started taking its toll on Phyllis' life. She had gingivitis. If she sank her teeth into anything solid, her gums started bleeding. In addition, her teeth were loose. In short, she was not a very healthy or physically-fit person. If you saw her, then you'd probably say she was "sickly."

When Phyllis was hit by a car, it was one more turn in the downward spiral of her life. She didn't have to go far from the broken back to find a bottom in her life. While she was in the hospital, a friend asked her to try Shaklee products. Her friend knew she ate poorly and wanted her to heal as quickly as possible. Fortunately, the broken back wasn't a crippling type, but it still needed to heal. There was a 30-day guarantee on the products, and her life couldn't get worse, so she started on a program like Rosanna's.

In six weeks she was out of the hospital. Phyllis had recovered from a broken back in record time. Her gums had healed and didn't bleed anymore. She could even eat hospital food. "Then it dawned on me what had really happened. The migraines were gone. I started life all over again. I was given a second chance."

Phyllis started a Shaklee business. One of her first decisions was to have her teeth capped once the business started paying. Now that her gums had healed, she knew she'd keep her teeth, so why not get them fixed? And by the way, she's had no more migraines.

#### ONE, LAST OBSERVATION

Phyllis is one of many stories of how migraine headaches often clear up with a good nutrition program. Though her gingivitis seems like a little icing on the cake, it's not. Recent research at Tufts' Medical School showed quite clearly that some people who have chronic gingivitis can clear it completely with about 600-milligrams daily of vitamin C. So while Phyllis proved the power of good nutrition, she also confirmed that each of us is an individual with our own nutritional needs.

#### A WORD FOR OPTIMISM

Both these stories bear witness to the preventive power of good nutrition, but they prove something that often goes without recognition. That's the support that comes from Shaklee people. The support comes in many forms, but it always adds up to an optimistic outlook.

An optimistic outlook is the ability to visualize yourself in better circumstances. It's an individual thing that only relates to you, but it works best when you have people supporting you. In Rosanna's life, it was a supportive husband; and in Phyllis' life, it was a soft-spoken friend who came into her life when she truly needed help.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Scala was educated at Columbia (B.A.), Cornell (Ph.D.), and Harvard (Post-doctoral studies) Universities.

He has spent his career in research, research management, and teaching. His accomplishments include over fifty published papers on research in nutrition, biochemistry, and biology. His teaching includes courses for undergraduate, graduate, medical, and dental school students.

As a research manager, Dr. Scala held positions at Procter and Gamble, Owens-Illinois, Unilever, General Foods, and was the Senior Vice-President of Scientific Affairs for the Shaklee Corporation. He now devotes his energies to writing and speaking for the general public.

Dr. Scala lives with his wife Nancy in Lafayette, California. For recreation, they sail the ketch La Scala from its home port on San Francisco Bay.