

How Food Restriction Helps:

Although our knowledge of what foods and food chemicals contribute to the precipitation of migraine attacks is incomplete, our clinical experience has demonstrated that a program of food restriction can be an effective adjunct to drug therapy.

Food chemicals suspected of being involved in triggering migraine attacks include tyramine(?), phenylethylamine, monosodium glutamate (MSG), and nitrates. These substances are found in:

- Alcohol
and their juices)
- Coffee (including decaffeinated coffee)
- Tea
- Bananas
- Nuts
- Chocolate
- Aged cheese
- Onions
- Yogurt
- Canned figs
- Avocado
- Hot dogs
- Bacon
- Dry soup mixes and
Similar products
(containing MSG)
- Chicken livers
- Fermented sausages
- Chinese food
(containing MSG)
- Accent (food spice)
- Red licorice
- Citrus fruits (oranges,
Lemons, limes, grapefruit
and their juices)
- Coffee (including decaffeinated coffee)
- Tea
- Bananas
- Nuts

These foods may lower the attack threshold over a period of several days or precipitate an attack in a matter of hours. The time lag between ingestion and effect makes it difficult for many patients to associate the food with a migraine attack. Also, not all patients respond adversely to all foods on the restricted list.

COUNSELING PATIENTS:

I counsel my patients to stay on what I call a “migraine prudent” diet for two or three months. An improvement in the patient’s headache condition is an indication that at least some of the foods are implicated. If the patient wishes, he could add one of the restricted foods at intervals of ten days to two weeks, noting any improvement or deterioration in the pattern of attacks. Many patients, however, prefer to strictly adhere to the diet, or to attempt adding only those foods for which they have a particular liking.