

Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

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Drug-Free Headache Remedies That Really Work

Simple steps you can take to prevent and relieve headaches, whether you get them occasionally or more often.

Headaches are one of the main reasons people pop pain killers, and they can seem like one of those things that are just part and parcel of life. But if you get more than one or two a month, it's a sign that something in your diet or other aspects of your life need attention.

In my practice, I look for the root causes of headaches and I've identified the basic things that trigger and perpetuate the most common types: sinus headaches, tension headaches, headaches on the side of the head, and migraines. The steps I describe below address these and can also help to prevent and relieve virtually any other type of headache, whether it's occasional and annoying or frequent and debilitating.

My new patients with headaches are surprised by some of my questions. How much water do you drink? How often do you eat? What do you eat? How much sleep do you usually get? Yet their answers are the first steps to eliminating the problem.

Don't just take my word for it.

Researchers who have thoroughly examined all the scientific evidence have concluded that diet and other aspects of lifestyle (which I cover below) are the first things that should be addressed to prevent and relieve headaches.¹

Effective Drug-Free Remedies

When I start talking about drug-free or natural remedies for headaches, people often assume that I mean herbs or other supplements in place of medications. There's a problem with this line of thinking: The flaw with drugs (aside from side effects) is that they are treating symptoms while masking the real causes of headaches. If you only try to substitute supplements for drugs and pay no attention to the underlying causes, the remedies are gentler but you're still only treating symptoms and the problem will never fully resolve.

As an analogy, if your rear end was hurting because you're sitting on a sharp object, you could take

a drug to relieve the pain. But you couldn't really resolve the situation until you got rid of that sharp object, which could be causing injury even if you felt less pain.

That may sound like a ridiculous situation, and it is. But with headaches, the equivalent of that sharp object may be harder to identify. In other cases, a likely trigger of headaches may become obvious once you know what to look for.

Dr. Marlene's

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One Patient's 5-Day Headache

I had a new patient whose first visit was on a Thursday. He had been suffering from an unrelenting headache since the previous Sunday morning, when he woke up after a night of binge drinking.

Before seeing me, he had been to two hospital emergency rooms and had received prescriptions for pain and anti-anxiety drugs, which didn't relieve the headache. He was also referred to a neurologist, which was frightening, and that's when he came to see me.

The Underlying Issue

This patient had experienced hangovers before, but never a headache for days, and he was at his wits' end. It didn't take me long to find out that he habitually slept about 3 hours a night. Add to that his drinking on the previous Saturday night, and his system just couldn't handle the effects. The headache was a very loud alarm.

It took a while to enlighten him to the fact that 3 hours of sleep just didn't cut it, but he eventually understood. He got more sleep, and the headache miraculously disappeared.

You might wonder how anyone could overlook such drastic sleep deprivation. When it's habitual, people lose touch with the feeling of being sleepy or tired — it becomes "normal," especially among older people.

Does the Type of Headache Matter?

Yes and no. Some issues, such as dehydration, underlie or contribute to all types of headaches, while others, such as misalignment of

vertebrae in the neck, are unique to specific types.

While most headaches are not life-threatening or an indication of a serious condition, this isn't always the case. For example, a sudden headache with numbness in an arm or slurred speech could be a sign of a stroke or mini-stroke and needs immediate medical attention. But strokes aren't always accompanied by a headache, and it's the combination of symptoms that would signal the need for immediate medical help.

Before I discuss different types of headaches, I want to cover the most common things that cause or contribute to all of them. In some cases, it takes some time to resolve an underlying cause, but in others, relief can be quick.

Headache Trigger #1: Dehydration

The most common factor related to headaches comes from habitually not drinking enough water. The older we get, the less we experience the sensation of thirst. Over time, being dehydrated seems normal, and you don't even feel thirsty.

I've had many patients resolve or reduce their headaches by drinking more water. I recommend drinking about half your body weight in ounces each day. For example, if you weigh 150 pounds, half of that is 75 — drink about 75 ounces of water daily.

A large soda cup in a fast-food restaurant holds about 32 ounces, so 75 ounces would be a bit more than two of those — filled with water rather than soda.

If drinking that much water makes you get up during the night for a bathroom trip, drink your

daily total before 7 pm. Do other liquids can count? Maybe — if they don't contain natural or added sugar, artificial flavoring, or other ingredients that turn them into a liquid dessert. But filtered water is the best choice.

One simple way to tell whether you're hydrated is by the color of your urine. If it's clear or pale yellow, you're okay, but if it's darker, you need more water. However, medications, supplements, and foods can change its color: B vitamins make it brighter yellow, and beets turn it pink or red, so this isn't foolproof.

Can Water Cure a Headache?

There isn't much scientific research on the subject of relieving a headache with water but a British study, at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London, found that drinking between 7 and 25 ounces of water relieved a headache in less than 30 minutes for some people, and within 3 hours for others.

These researchers concluded: "Water-deprivation headache is common, recognized by the public, but not described in the medical literature."²

Not all headaches will be relieved by water alone, but regardless of the headache trigger, dehydration will worsen the condition. Without enough fluids, your body can't detoxify normal byproducts of energy production, let alone toxins in food and the environment, all of which may trigger or contribute to headaches. (Volume 1, Issue 7, of this newsletter covers detoxification in more detail.)

Constipation Contributes to Problems

Constipation can be a side effect of dehydration, because your body needs fluids to eliminate waste. As well as drinking enough filtered water, it's essential to eat plenty of non-starchy vegetables for fiber as well as nutrients.

If you're doing both these things and still aren't regular, take some magnesium. It can be any type, in pills or powder that you can dissolve in your filtered water.

Start with about 200 mg daily and increase the amount if necessary. If you take more than your body can handle, loose stools are the result. Cut back to a bit less than the dosage that caused the loose stools and that will be your personal optimum amount of magnesium.

Headache Trigger #2: Low Blood Sugar

Your brain needs glucose, the form of sugar that's in your blood after you eat. If you go too long between meals or snacks, blood sugar can drop too low and the brain gets starved. It makes you irritable and hungry, or "hangry," and lack of brain fuel can trigger a headache.

Eating large portions of starchy carbohydrates, such as large bowls of pasta and sugary treats, can start the low blood-sugar cycle. A large amount of carbs makes blood sugar spike to high levels, and then drop too low, starving your brain.

This type of spike-crash cycle develops from a very common, long-term pattern of overloading on carbs. People with pre-diabetes or diabetes are especially

susceptible to low blood sugar, and it makes diabetics twice as likely to suffer from headaches.³

Magnesium and Migraines

People who have migraines are more likely to be deficient in magnesium than others. They may have a genetic inability to absorb the mineral or may be eating a diet that lacks magnesium. Studies have shown that many people get relief from migraines by taking extra magnesium, and intravenous magnesium can bring quick relief from migraine attacks for some people. However, a magnesium deficiency is not the cause of all migraines.⁴

A Pastry Chef Gets Headache Relief

One of my patients was a pastry chef who ate a high-carb diet and went for hours without eating. She was thin and seemed healthy, but often got headaches. And, she was always tired, but thought it was because she had two young kids.

I helped her work out how to reduce the carbs in her diet and to eat more often. Her headaches disappeared, and her sleep and energy miraculously improved. The problem was carbs, not kids.

As a quick remedy, make sure to have a meal or snack every 3 hours, and always include some healthy fat. I cover this in detail in *The Guide to Healthy Eating* in Volume 1, Issue 8, of this newsletter.

Headache Trigger #3: Sleep

There's no substitute for sleep. It's a time when your whole body, including your brain, detoxifies and regenerates. Without enough

sleep, your body doesn't get a chance to restore itself, and one of the symptoms can be a headache.

In my practice, I've found lack of sleep to be one of the most common headache triggers. And most often, simply not putting a high enough priority on sleep is the problem. Shut down digital devices at least an hour before bed and allow enough time to get sufficient rest before morning — between 7 and 8 hours for most people.

In addition to triggering headaches, lack of sleep also

increases sensitivity to pain.⁵ And, it interferes with normal, healthy metabolism, increasing the odds of a problem with blood sugar — another possible headache trigger.

Headache Trigger #4: Stress

Stress can make you tense the muscles in your neck and upper back and trigger a headache. Over time, this can compress vertebrae and lead to herniated discs, which leads to more headaches. Stress can also make you clench or grind your teeth — another possible headache trigger.

To de-stress, see if you can reorganize things in your life to reduce the impact of your usual stressful situations and take some time to relax and restore your mental and emotional balance.

There isn't any one way that works best for everyone, but things that many people find helpful include meditation, yoga, tai chi, other types of exercise, and taking time out for enjoyable activities. Some people de-stress by hiking or going for a bike ride, while others enjoy reading a novel or becoming a volunteer for a worthy cause they believe in. Most important, find what works for you.

Headache Trigger #5: Offending Food Ingredients

One or more food ingredients can give you headaches. If you can't tolerate gluten, for example, be sure to avoid it. Perhaps it isn't the only reason for your headaches, but it won't help.

If you eat packaged food or fast food, be aware that you may be ingesting dozens of chemical substances, and a combination of

these could trigger a bad reaction. I've seen highly processed guacamole with 35 ingredients besides the avocado — most of them not found in nature. The easiest way to avoid problems is to prepare food from scratch.

I recommend addressing the first four triggers above as a first step, and if that doesn't resolve your headaches, start looking at different food ingredients. If you suspect one or more, eliminate it for at least a few weeks. It can take your body's reaction that long, or longer, to calm down.

If there's improvement, continue avoiding the ingredient until your headaches are stably eliminated. And then, try reintroducing small amounts of one ingredient and see if you react. Food sensitivities can be temporary or long-lasting, and the key is to learn what you can and cannot tolerate.

Headache Trigger #6: Environmental Toxins

Each of us has a different level of tolerance for various toxins. Chemicals can trigger headaches when you smell them, inhale them, or absorb them through your skin. Artificial scents in candles, air fresheners, and cleaning and cosmetic products can be triggers.

Mold in your home or workplace is another, lesser-known culprit. One of my patients, a teacher, attributed her frequent headaches to stress, because they struck whenever she was in the school building. But it turned out that mold in the building — not stress — was the headache trigger.

If you've addressed all the other possible triggers and still experience headaches, it can take

Delicious Pies Without Sugar

Xylitol is a natural, sugar-free sweetener that comes in crystals that look and taste just like sugar. You can substitute xylitol for sugar in recipes for pies and other baked desserts. But there's one catch: If you eat too much of it, xylitol can have a laxative effect.

I've found this to be a good formula that's delicious and has no side effects: For 1 cup of sugar in a recipe, substitute $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of xylitol plus 1 to 2 squirts of liquid stevia, which can be plain or flavored.

Stevia can have an aftertaste, but I've found that this isn't a problem with liquid versions. I also use flavored liquid stevia in tea and coffee.

One of my patients who is a pastry chef first saw me just before Thanksgiving, and she was going to bake pies for her family. She baked two pumpkin pies, one made with sugar and the other made with xylitol and liquid stevia, and asked her family which one they liked best.

They all preferred the xylitol-stevia version. However, they refused to believe that it wasn't a traditional pie made with sugar.

a bit of detective work to identify potential environmental toxins, but it's worth the effort. For products you use in your home, it's always a good idea to choose non-toxic versions, especially if you have headaches or other physical issues.

Changing your moisturizer, cleanser, and cleaning and laundry products can make a big difference and is simple to do. Mold can be trickier to deal with, and I'll address it in more detail in a future issue. But as a starting point, be alert for damp spots around the house where mold can grow, and take practical steps to get rid of the moisture.

Most Common Types of Headaches

There are some specific remedies for the most common types of headaches. They don't replace the other steps I've outlined above but are necessary in specific situations.

Sinus Headache: Pressure in the sinuses, often as a result of allergies, infection, or irritation from dust or other contaminants, can be relieved by rinsing out your nasal passages. A nasal rinse immediately reduces the pressure and relieves at least some headache pain. How long the relief lasts will vary, but you can repeat the process several times a day.

My top recommendation is to use a Neilmed Saline Sinus Rinse, available in drugstores and online. It's a squeeze bottle that comes with packets of a special salt, which you mix with distilled water. You must use distilled water, as any other type can contain bacteria that could cause other serious problems. Get the water to body temperature by microwaving it for

about 20 seconds before mixing in the salt.

The product comes with detailed directions but basically, you squeeze the solution into one nostril until it comes out the other, and then repeat on the other side. You literally rinse out your nasal passages. Do this one or more times daily, until your sinuses feel normal. The same company makes a battery-operated version, but I've found that the squeeze bottle works very well.

Another option is a neti pot, which is shaped like a magic lamp in tales of Aladdin. With it, you pour a saline solution into one nostril and it comes out the other. Compared to the squeeze bottle, it can be trickier to use.

With a neti pot, you have to tilt your head to the side, and I've found that some people get water into their ear or find the approach uncomfortable. With a squeeze bottle, you keep your head upright.

The squeeze bottle is easier and more pleasant to use for most people. It's also a good remedy for sinus congestion when you have a cold or flu.

Tension Headache: You typically feel it in the back of the head, because it stems from tension in your neck and upper-back muscles. For immediate relief, ice (frozen peas wrapped in a dish cloth will work) or hot compresses on these muscles can help. It's hard to predict which one will work best at a given time, so experiment.

A massage that relaxes the muscles can also give you relief, sometimes very quickly. You'll instantly feel at least a bit better, and it may make the headache go away in the next hour or so.

If a massage increases the pain, stop. Misalignment of the vertebrae in your spine can be an underlying problem that won't resolve until it's corrected. If you

About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt's passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others, and her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cross-country cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from extreme fatigue and constant pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master's in Nutrition, and is an Applied Clinical Nutritionist. She is Board Certified in Bariatric Counseling, and certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol,[™] a groundbreaking method of reversing Alzheimer's disease. She sees patients at the Merritt Wellness Centers in Austin, Texas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, trains health practitioners nationwide, and is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*.



suspect this may be the case, see a chiropractor, get some x-rays, and get the misalignment corrected.

Side Headache: When the pain is mostly on one side of your head, it most often comes from clenching or grinding your teeth. This puts pressure on the temporomandibular joint (TMJ for short), which acts as a hinge that connects your jawbone with your skull. It's the joint that enables you to open and close your mouth.

The basic treatment is seeing a

Diet, Migraines, and Other Headaches

A review of more than 180 studies found that diet plays a key role in preventing migraines and other headaches in two ways: By providing nutrients from low-carb, whole foods that include healthy fats, and by avoiding specific foods that are triggers.⁷

Triggers vary from one individual to another, but according to the American Migraine Foundation, these are some common ones:

- Alcohol, especially red wine
- Chocolate
- Caffeine (or caffeine withdrawal)
- Aspartame
- Beans
- Cheeses
- Yogurt
- MSG
- Processed meats that contain sulfites, such as bacon, sausages, salami, or ham
- Sauerkraut
- Soy sauce
- Fish or shrimp sauce
- Miso soup
- Yeast extract

dentist and getting a mouthguard to wear while you sleep, and sometimes another one to wear when practical during the day. The aim is to keep your jaw unclenched to allow the surrounding muscles and the joint to relax.

Some people have been gritting their teeth all their lives, and it feels “normal.” A properly fitted mouthguard can give you a surprising amount of relief, sometimes quite quickly. And a relaxed jaw may make sleep more restful.

Migraine: An aura — bright lights, blind spots, or other changes in vision — is one of the symptoms associated with a migraine, but it isn't always present. Other symptoms may include weakness; nausea; sensitivity to light, sound, or smell; or blurred vision. But the pain is always intense.

Unlike blood pressure or temperature, there is no objective test to determine that a headache is a migraine, so any intense headache could be classified as one. When headaches are severe, medical tests are done to rule out diseases of the brain or nervous system, and if none are found, the headache may be diagnosed as a migraine.

Compared to other headaches, the difference in treatment is that there are drugs designated to prevent or treat headaches that have been labeled as migraines. However, they aren't recommended as a first line of treatment or for long-term use, can cause rebound headaches when discontinued, and have a long list of side effects, including sleepiness, dizziness, flushing, tingling, and tightness in the throat and chest.⁶

Herbs and Supplements

As I mentioned earlier, herbs and other supplements shouldn't be viewed as a gentler substitute for drugs without addressing what's causing your headaches. But that doesn't mean they can't help. Helpful herbs include feverfew and butterbur, and nutritional supplements include magnesium and Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10).

A Final Word

If you don't address the triggers I've described, especially the first three, any herbs or other supplements you take will face an uphill battle. My patients are continually amazed by the relief they experience by drinking more water, eating the right diet, and getting enough sleep.

If you follow my advice and don't get relief, I suggest seeing a health professional. Look for an “integrative” or “holistic” practitioner, or one who practices “functional medicine,” which looks for and addresses the root causes of health problems.

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How to Avoid Pitfalls of Sweet Summer Drinks

Sodas, lemonade, iced teas, fruit juices, and fruit punches taste especially good on a hot summer day, and it's easy to drink a lot. But they're one of the chief sources of carb overload, which leads to

weight gain and health problems. (See Volume 1, Issue 8, of this newsletter for details.)

To cut the carbs without sacrificing the pleasure, make your own drinks, sweetened with



liquid stevia. It contains no carbs, no calories, and unlike artificial sweeteners, doesn't pose any health risks.

I prefer liquid stevia over powdered versions as the liquid version comes in over a dozen flavors, or plain, and is easy to squirt into drinks. But start with a tiny amount, as it's very sweet.

16 ounces (2 cups)	Carbs	Equivalent Teaspoons of Sugar (approximate)
Colas and other sodas	50 grams	12
Lemonade	50 grams	12
Fruit juices	50 grams	12
Fruit punch	50–60 grams	12–15
Sweetened iced tea	30–40 grams	7–10

Walnut Study: Behind the Headlines

Every once in a while, a study about a particular food makes news, but the full facts are not revealed. A case in point is some recent headlines saying: "Walnuts reduce blood pressure." So, should you start eating walnuts every day? Not necessarily.

Here's what the headlines didn't say: The study was done on people in Spain, who were eating a Mediterranean diet high in olive oil and plant foods.¹ The effect of walnuts may not be the same with a typical American diet.

In the 236 people in the study, half ate a specific amount of walnuts daily for 2 years, while the other half ate no nuts. At the end of the



study period, both groups had lower blood pressure, with a larger drop in the walnut group.

But here's a really important point: The walnut eaters ate less carbohydrates and sugars. In other words, they didn't just keep eating their usual foods plus walnuts. Rather, they replaced some carbs and sugar with walnuts.

The take-home message:

Walnuts and other nuts are healthy foods that can enhance your health if they replace starchy or sugary foods and are eaten in small amounts — no more than a handful, or about a dozen walnut halves a day. It's all too easy to eat too many and expand your waistline.

Antibiotics Raise Women's Risk for Heart Disease and Stroke

Antibiotics can be life-saving drugs, but long-term use raises risk for heart disease and stroke, at least in women. That's the finding of a study at Tulane University in New Orleans.²

Researchers tracked over 32,000 women for an average of about 7 years. They found that women over the age of 60 who took antibiotics for two months or more were 32 percent more likely to suffer from heart disease or a stroke. Taking the drugs for two or more months after age 40 also increased risk, but to a lesser extent. The mechanism underlying this is disruption of gut

¹ Domènech, M., et al. "Effect of a Walnut Diet on Office and 24-Hour Ambulatory Blood Pressure in Elderly Individuals." *Hypertension*. 2019 May;73(5):1049-1057. ² Heianza, Y., et al. "Duration and life-stage of antibiotic use and risk of cardiovascular events in women." *European Heart Journal*. doi:10.1093/eurheartj/ehz231.

bacteria, as antibiotics kill good bacteria as well as bad. And a healthy balance of gut bacteria is essential for every aspect of health.

Did You Know?

Ages 90 to 99 is the fastest-growing age group of people who run marathons.¹

Eating fermented foods, such as sauerkraut made with live cultures, and other fermented foods, helps to replenish and maintain healthy gut bacteria. And probiotic supplements may provide additional help after an antibiotic regimen.

How to Store Olive Oil

Extra virgin olive oil is a healthy fat and contains antioxidants that help protect against heart disease, mental decline, cancer, and diabetes. But unlike wine, it doesn't get better with age. If it isn't packaged and stored correctly, it degrades and loses its beneficial qualities.

Start by buying a good-quality oil, which should be made by pressing the olives without heat or chemicals. It should smell and taste fresh. Ideally, the label should list

a harvest date and the oil should be less than two years old.

The antioxidants in olive oil degrade when exposed to heat and light. More antioxidants are lost if the oil is in a plastic bottle rather than glass, according to a Spanish study that tested antioxidant levels in the oil when it was stored in different containers and in light and dark.²

A dark glass bottle, can, or clear glass bottle that comes in a box or is covered by a large label can all protect the oil from light. At home, keep olive oil in a cool cupboard or pantry and use it within six weeks of opening the bottle.

Surprising Benefits of Folding Laundry

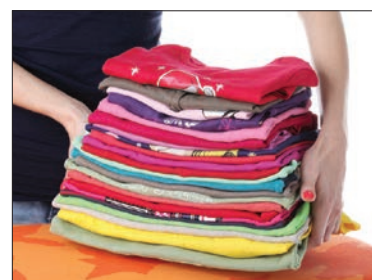
When I talk to patients about being more physically active, many assume that means embarking on some type of regimented exercise program that seems unrealistic. It might bring up memories of sports they played in their youth, or the idea of having to join a gym and feeling embarrassed next to 20-something weightlifters with lean, sculpted bodies.

The fact is that even small amounts of physical activity around the house can make a big difference in how well you feel and how healthy you remain for the rest of your life. The benefits come from doing a variety of little things that become part of your usual routine. Many studies have shown this to be true, and a recent one underscores the point.

At the University of California, San Diego, researchers tracked physical activity and health among more than 5,800 women age 63 and older, for 5 years. They found that light activity, such as folding laundry and doing other household chores, gardening, or strolling through a park, lowered risk of a heart attack or death by as much as 42 percent, and risk of stroke by up to 22 percent.³ Other research has found similar benefits among men.

Beneficial activities include:

- All sorts of household chores, such as putting away groceries, dusting, vacuuming, cleaning windows, cooking, washing dishes, folding laundry, and organizing cupboards.
- Gardening.
- Any type of walking, even at a leisurely pace.
- All types of recreational activities, such as fishing, playing croquet or pool, or golfing.



This isn't to say that exerting yourself more than that isn't beneficial — it certainly is. And if you're already quite active around your home and garden, consider some new ways to be more active. Consider joining a local walking group of people in your age group or getting together with a friend for a brisk walk once or twice a week. But for anyone who spends a lot of the day sitting, at home or at work, getting up and doing any type of physical movement can have a surprisingly beneficial effect.

1 World's Largest & Most Recent Marathon Study. <https://runnerclick.com/marathon-finishing-times-study-and-statistics/> 2 de la Torre Robles, A., et al. "Effect of Light Exposure on the Quality and Phenol Content of Commercial Extra Virgin Olive Oil during 12 Month Storage." *J Am Oil Chem Soc*, 96: 381-389. doi:10.1002/aocs.12198. 3 LaCroix, A.Z., et al. "Association of Light Physical Activity Measured by Accelerometry and Incidence of Coronary Heart Disease and Cardiovascular Disease in Older Women." *JAMA Netw Open*. 2019 Mar 1;2(3):e190419.

Top 20 Sleep Myths Exposed

False ideas about sleep can keep you from getting enough rest, leaving you tired all the time and more prone to accidents and chronic health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease. But sleep myths are rampant online.

A team of researchers led by the NYU School of Medicine combed through more than 8,000 websites and identified these top 20 incorrect assumptions about sleep.¹

How Much Sleep Is Enough?

- Many adults need only 5 hours or less sleep for general health. **Fact:** Adults need 7 to 9 hours.
- Adults sleep more as they get older. **Fact:** Teens need the most sleep: 8 to 10 hours. Adults need 7 to 9 hours between the ages of 18 and 64, and 7 to 8 hours after that, according to the National Sleep Foundation.
- If you can get it, more sleep is always better. **Fact:** Too much sleep can be a sign of depression or other health problems.
- You can learn to function just as well with less sleep. **Fact:** Chronic sleep deprivation increases health risks and shortens life.
- Being able to fall asleep anytime, anywhere means you're a good sleeper. **Fact:** It could be a sign of sleep deprivation, narcolepsy, or other health issues.
- One night of sleep deprivation will have lasting negative health

consequences. **Fact:** What you do most of the time has the biggest effect, but sleep deprivation is never a good thing.

- It doesn't matter when you sleep. **Fact:** Sleep between 10 pm and 6 am is most restful.

What Helps or Harms Sleep?

- Alcohol before bed will improve your sleep. **Fact:** Alcohol makes it harder to achieve deep sleep.
- A warmer bedroom is better than a cooler one. **Fact:** A cooler bedroom is better.
- Exercising within 4 hours of bedtime will disturb your sleep. **Fact:** Exercise improves sleep, but I recommend allowing an hour or so to wind down before bed.
- Boredom can make you sleepy even if you got enough sleep. **Fact:** Older adults who are less bored experience better sleep. But if you're tired and in a boring situation, you're more likely to nod off.
- Watching television in bed is a good way to relax before bedtime. **Fact:** Television can act as a stimulant and prevent restful sleep. It's better to read a book.
- Lying in bed with your eyes closed is almost as good as sleeping. **Fact:** The processes in your brain, heart, and the rest of your body don't rest and regenerate properly unless you really are asleep.
- If you can't fall asleep, it's best to stay in bed and keep trying.



Fact: Studies show that it's better to get up and do something (other than using an electronic device whose blue light will keep you up) until you're tired, and then go back to bed.

- Although annoying for bed partners, loud snoring is mostly harmless. **Fact:** It can be a sign of sleep apnea, which increases risks for heart disease and diabetes.
- A sound sleeper rarely moves at night. **Fact:** Small movements are normal.

Other Myths

- During sleep, the brain is not active. **Fact:** It's always active, and during sleep it detoxifies waste products that are normal byproducts of life.
- Hitting the snooze button on your alarm is better than getting up right away. **Fact:** It's best to set your alarm for the time you will really get up.
- An afternoon nap is a good way to compensate for lack of sleep. **Fact:** Habitual naps can perpetuate insomnia.
- Remembering your dreams is a sign of a good night's sleep. **Fact:** Sleep research doesn't support this idea.

¹ Robbins, R., et al. "Sleep myths: an expert-led study to identify false beliefs about sleep that impinge upon population sleep health practices." *Sleep Health*. 2019 Apr 16. pii: S2352-7218(19)30025-7. doi: 10.1016/j.sleh.2019.02.002. [Epub ahead of print]



THE MOST THRILLING WAY TO EAT HEALTHY!

Feel your taste buds come alive...

If you like eating healthy, but hate bland and boring foods, you'll be excited to hear this...

For dinner tonight, you could be eating cheesy chicken and sweet potatoes... and then wake up tomorrow to a savory apple and sausage breakfast scramble... only to pack a scrumptious lunch of Thai turkey meatballs and cauliflower rice.

These meals are **delicious** and **nutritious**, and most important, they're **"perfect"** for healthy blood sugar and healthy blood pressure.

We hired a professional nutrition planner with a degree in culinary arts to create hundreds of complete meal plans. And all of them **adhere to the healthy eating formula** of 65% healthy fats, 25% protein, and 10% carbohydrates.

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Karen L. says:

"Dishes are delicious, they eliminated my cravings, I'm no longer hungry all the time, and better yet, I'm full. I no longer call this a diet. It's simply eating healthy."

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Q&A

Q: I have type 2 diabetes and have not been able to lower my blood sugar with diet alone, so I take metformin. Is it safe to take *Gymnema sylvestre* along with the medication? — Judy N.

A: There is no evidence to show that combining metformin and *Gymnema sylvestre* would be unsafe. But if you decide to take the herb, it's essential to monitor your levels of blood sugar and work with your doctor.

When a drug is prescribed for type 2 diabetes, the dose is based on your levels of blood sugar at that time. *Gymnema sylvestre* is an herb that can also lower blood sugar. If you add it to your drug regimen, your levels of blood sugar could drop too low.

Symptoms of low blood sugar can include feeling lightheaded, dizzy, shaky, and confused; being irritable or anxious; or having a fast heartbeat. If severe enough, the condition can be dangerous. This is one of the reasons why it's important to regularly check blood sugar if you're taking any diabetes medication, and it's even more important if you add an herb.

In Ayurveda — traditional Indian medicine — *Gymnema sylvestre* has been used to treat diabetes for nearly 2,000 years. The first scientific study that showed it lowers blood sugar was done almost a century ago, and more studies have been done in the last few decades.

If you taste *Gymnema* on your tongue, it blocks the sensation of sweetness, making sweet foods and drinks less appealing. When swallowed in a pill, it helps to normalize blood-sugar levels. In studies, type 2 diabetics who took *Gymnema* were able to reduce drug dosages or discontinue the drugs.

Please keep in mind that any remedy, whether it's a medication, an herb, or any other nutritional supplement, will be more effective when combined with the right diet. I'm not sure what type of diet you tried to lower your blood sugar, but I encourage you to take a look at *The Guide to Healthy Eating* in Volume 1, Issue 8, of this newsletter. It describes a dietary approach that I developed, and it's helped many of my patients to reduce or eliminate their need for diabetes medications.

Q: I just turned 59 and got a check-up for the first time in years. I'm in great shape but my doctor told me to get a colonoscopy. Do I really need one? — Don L.

A: Screening for colon cancer is recommended between the ages of 50 and 75 for most people, and earlier in life if there is a family history of the disease. However, a colonoscopy is not the only possible test.

The advantage of a colonoscopy, usually done every 10 years, is that if polyps are detected, they can be removed at the time of the test. But the downside is that patients are given anesthesia. After age 40, the risks of side effects from anesthesia increase, especially in terms of cognitive impairment.

There is also some risk of bleeding or tearing.

There are other screening tests that require only stool samples. These need to be done more often than colonoscopies but are non-invasive and pose no risks. A lab provides a kit for you to take a stool sample at home and send in for analysis.

One such test, FIT (short for "fecal immunochemical test"), looks for blood in the stool. It's the least expensive and should be done once a year. Another stool test, which I favor, is a FIT-DNA test, typically done every 3 years. It looks for blood and for DNA of cancerous cells. A special type of CT scan is another option but is not as widely used.

I recommend that you definitely get screened for colon cancer and encourage you to ask your doctor about a stool test.

Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com. Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email support@primalhealthlp.com or call 877-300-7849.