

Ayurveda - Health notes

Headaches

Ah! That shooting pain, that dull ache inside your skull. Headaches make one cry out for quick relief; and with extra-strength analgesics available round the clock and around the corner, help is indeed close at hand.

Ayurvedic physicians, however, compare headache management to fighting a fire. Here is the analogy: a headache is like a fire alarm. It is a signal that something is wrong. Would you simply destroy the alarm instead of trying to detect the source of the fire? Of course not.

But when you pop a painkiller, you are actually trying to quieten your body's distress signals, instead of discovering and addressing the underlying imbalance.

Reputed ayurvedic physician Dr Donn Brennan suggests you take a closer look at your dosha imbalances the next time a headache hits.

Many a time, the culprit is a vitiated Vata-the most dominant and restless of the three doshas.

HOW VATA HEADACHES HAPPEN :

Ayurveda lists several factors that can cause Vata to go out of balance. Some of them are:

- * Not sleeping well
- * Not eating foods that nurture the brain
- * Eating very dry or cold foods
- * Eating leftovers or junk foods
- * Keeping an irregular routine of meals and sleep
- * Overexposure to cool, dry air
- * Excessive reading, television watching or stressing at work * Excessive air travel

Especially affected by these irregularities are two Vata sub-doshas: Apana Vata and Prana Vata.

Apana Vata, can be called the foundation of all other Vata sub-doshas. When this sub-dosha is disturbed, it creates pressure on the other sub-doshas. Apana Vata is disturbed when you eat very dry foods, like air-popped corn; or when you skip meals or eat later in the day than you should. Sitting in the same position for a long time is also a factor that throws Apana Vata out of balance.

Prana Vata is the ruling sub-dosha of Vata. And the head is the adhishtan or seat of Prana Vata. An out-of-balance Prana Vata creates maladies like constipation, which in turn give rise to headaches. On the other hand, headaches can also result in Vata-related digestive problems like constipation. All these problems occur when there is a basic problem in the way you are eating, sleeping or working.

Other Vata sub-doshas also should not be ignored when considering headache-causing factors. Samana Vata, which governs movement of food through the digestive tract, can also cause headaches. This happens, for example, when a person suffers from gas, which travels up the chest and rises to give you a throbbing headache.

SOLUTIONS FOR VATA HEADACHES :

The next time you have a headache, Dr Brennan recommends you do a mental scan to check for the factors responsible. He calls it Nidaan Parivarjan-scoping out the problem. Ask

check for the factors responsible. He calls it Nidaan Parivarjan-scoping out the problem. Ask yourself how much of your brain's capacity you are using. Are you stressing too much? Sleeping badly? Worrying or fretting a lot?

Next, check your diet patterns. The health of your Vata dosha depends to a great extent on the kind of food you eat and the regularity with which you stick to your mealtimes. Vata is appeased when you eat brain-nourishing foods like soaked walnuts, soaked almonds, soaked pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds. Especially in the context of headaches, foods that nourish the brain are very healing. In general, your food should be warm and unctuous. For example, people who are dominated by Vata dosha can find plain steamed vegetables too drying. They will feel better when their vegetables and lentils are cooked with a healthy fat such as ghee or olive oil. Further, to keep Vata balanced, include light squashes in your diet. Take fibrous foods. Eating pomegranate soothes Vata, too.

Also very helpful is Peace of Mind: the herbs in this beverage are very relaxing to mind, body and spirit. If you dilute one or two tea-bag in one quart of water, and then sip the water through the day, you'll find it yields even more of a relaxing effect.

Massage is another excellent therapy. The simplest way to get relief is to press the back of your neck and your shoulders with your fingers. This relaxes tense muscles. You can also request a friend or co-worker to do this for you. Breathe deep while doing this gentle neck-kneading. Even if you don't have a headache, a quick five-minute neck massage can take the edge off your stressful day. Be it over-stimulation from long hours at work, or jet lag-you'll find this a good therapy to work into your day.

Massage using Maharishi Ayurveda therapeutic massage oils is also extremely beneficial. A gentle head/scalp massage comes with a range of benefits that includes enhanced circulation and relaxation of nerves and muscles. For head massage, Ayurveda recommends Relaxation Oil. Even better, treat your entire body to a warm, soothing massage. For full body massage, use vata massage oil. This gives you the benefit of Vata-pacifying herbs. If you experience constipation, then besides following this dietary advice, you'll benefit from taking Digest Tea and Amla-Berry. The herbs in these formulations regulate the metabolism, decrease toxins, and thus make you feel healthier in every way.

Basically, it helps to follow the rhythms of nature and do everything in moderation-too much or too little of almost everything can cause Vata to go out of balance.

If your headaches are chronic and recurrent in nature, you should schedule an appointment with a good ayurvedic physician in your area, who will take your pulse and design an individualized program for restoring balance.