

UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

Dedicated to increasing knowledge about safe and effective complementary and integrative medicine approaches.

Integrative Management of Migraines

CIM Staff including:

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A total of 12-14% of the adult population experience migraine headaches, affecting women twice as often as men¹. Migraines are among the more common problems leading to medical office and emergency department visits. Individuals with migraines may experience significant disruption in their lives and associated mental health difficulties. Most often, headaches start spontaneously, but many patients experiencing the greatest struggles have sustained head injuries, even relatively minor ones.

If someone with significant difficulties is not receiving treatment at a neurology office, we recommend consultation at the [UPMC Headache Center](#). The cornerstones of standard approaches to headache management include medications, lifestyle changes, and, if needed, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Pharmacologic treatment may be abortive—directed towards episodes — or preventive, meaning when headaches are more frequent and severe. The American Migraine Foundation lists the following lifestyle recommendations for self-care and prevention²:

- Maintain regular sleep patterns
- Exercise regularly, at least 30 minutes three times a week of aerobic activity
- Eat regularly, don't skip meals, and eat a good healthy breakfast
- Reduce stress
- Avoid known triggers

Many people don't achieve complete relief with medication and lifestyle treatment, leading close to half of patients to pursue complementary and integrative therapies³⁻⁵. A common denominator of many of these approaches is a shift in the body's autonomic nervous system from fight-or-flight to boosting the parasympathetic system, which is associated with relaxation and focused attention. Considerations for patients may include:

Biofeedback: There is strong research evidence for biofeedback for migraine and other headaches, on par with the relief from medications⁶. Recent studies support our experience that other mind-body approaches extend this same benefit⁷. Interoception is a person's awareness of the sensations coming from the body. Our minds go in so many directions, it's no wonder that we lose touch with our bodies' signals. Biofeedback uses technology to help a person become aware of bodily sensations and make changes in physiology. In the case of migraines, we measure and display skin temperature and muscle tightness to help a person focus in. The

patient is instructed on exercises such as relaxing imagery, head-to-toe focus with progressive muscle relaxation, or breathing techniques borrowed from yoga. Changes on the computer provide immediate feedback of the effect of these exercises. With continued practice of these skills at home, without the computer, patients may see improvement in their level of distress and headache frequency and severity.

Acupuncture provides a greater reduction in pain than placebo control treatments and a comparable level of relief as preventive medications^{8,9}. Within the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) system, problems such as migraines may be caused by a blockage of *qi* or energy flow along the meridians or channels. The acupuncturist chooses the best points to open up these channels, based on pain location. Commonly, these points are located on the arms, legs, and torso. A course of six to eight treatments over a few weeks are usually needed to break the migraine cycle. Once headaches start to improve, less frequent maintenance visits may keep a patient on track.

Chinese Herbal Medicine: Chinese herbalists have been treating migraine and other headaches for centuries, with developing research support^{10,11}. We often use commercially produced herbal combinations. As with acupuncture, the approach seeks to open up blocked energy channels. Certain herbs activate *qi* while others guide these effects to the area of the head¹². One five-agent combination TCM remedy may help alleviate headache symptoms in this way. A proper evaluation is needed to determine the cause of the migraines, within the TCM system. You may want to speak with a Chinese herbalist to see which specific formula is appropriate for your type of headache.

Avoidance of dietary triggers: Many foods may serve as triggers for migraine. The most common are alcohol, chocolate, and foods containing histamine and tyramine, especially nuts and aged cheeses¹³⁻¹⁵. Red wine and dark beer are the most implicated forms of alcohol. Histamine and tyramine foods include bananas, citrus fruits, dried beans, spinach, tomato, soy sauce, and fermented foods such as sauerkraut. Foods containing nitrites and sulfites can trigger migraines. Those with nitrites include hot dogs, salami, and pepperoni, whereas those with sulfites include bacon, sausage, salami, and ham. The flavor enhancer monosodium glutamate (MSG), and the artificial sweetener aspartame are also associated with migraines. Even gluten-containing grains such as wheat, rye, and barley are known to initiate migraine headaches¹⁶. With so many foods associated with migraines, it can be overwhelming to identify specific triggers in an individual. The most effective way to investigate food triggers is an elimination diet^{17,18}. You can discuss this with your health care provider.

Inside CIM Newsletter

Migraines	1-2 Events & Groups	3
Migraines continued...	4 Classes & Lectures	4

Continued on page 2...

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Judicious use of supplements: Several supplements may be helpful for people with migraines¹⁹. A dose of 500-600mg daily of magnesium may help prevent migraine headaches, possibly by altering blood flow in the brain²⁰. Also consider a combination of fish oil and curcumin—an anti-inflammatory extract from turmeric. Two clinical trials found that taking this combination for two months reduced migraine frequency and inflammatory markers^{21,22}. Lastly, melatonin has been found to prevent migraines at doses ranging from 2 to 4 mg at bedtime daily²³. Be sure to discuss this with your physician and health care team, since many supplements interact with medications or may not be appropriate for every individual.

Functional Medicine: Within this model, we seek to identify triggers or perpetuating factors that contribute to the migraines²⁴. Concerns that may be addressed include:

- Genetic factors, which govern steps in metabolism
- Life stressors, traumatic experiences, and other physical or psychological challenges
- Food sensitivities and nutrient deficiencies
- Problems involving the gut including microbial imbalance, nutrient deficiencies, and impaired intestinal integrity (leaky gut)
- Toxic exposures such as pesticides and heavy metals
- Chronic infection, inflammation, and disturbance in the body's immune system
- Imbalance of blood sugar or hormonal regulation

As in other areas of medicine, diagnosis is clinical, based on symptoms and chronology, along with the judicious use of specialty lab tests. Treatment can include exercise and purposeful movement; specific nutrients; regulation of sleep cycle; work on stress management; and psychotherapy to heal emotional traumas.

Craniosacral Therapy (CST) is a gentle massage modality which may help migraines regardless of the cause²⁵. The therapist engages with the cranium and surrounding structures to relieve tension and balance the flow of cerebrospinal fluid²⁶. This modality can be combined with other traditional massage techniques. The vagus nerve is a key part of the parasympathetic system, and CST can stimulate this pathway, allowing deep relaxation²⁷. Often, through massage of the head and adjacent muscles, clients describe a release sensation that continues to loosen over the hours that follow and may provide immediate reduction of migraine symptoms. We think about craniosacral therapy for head and face pain associated with concussion, temporomandibular joint (TMJ) difficulties, and sinus problems²⁸.

Shiatsu for relief and self-care: Shiatsu, the Japanese form of acupressure, provides another option for relieving migraine pain and reducing headache frequency²⁹. This technique uses the same energy meridians or channels in the body that are treated in acupuncture. We think of it as acupuncture without the needles and with the relaxing benefits of massage. Gentle calming pressure is used selectively along the meridians to clear tension from the head, neck, and face. The Shiatsu practitioner treats specific acupoints, based on the location of the head pain. These techniques draw tension down and away, smooth the energetic flow, and support overall wellness of the

whole-body system. Self-Shiatsu can prevent more severe headaches and help manage them when they occur. The Shiatsu practitioner can teach a person specific points to use for pain relief and relaxation effect.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) addresses the negative inner dialogue which may exacerbate pain. Thoughts such as “It’s bound to get worse,” “I’ll have to miss work again,” and other beliefs that catastrophize the experience, add yet another layer of distress. These notions are addressed by making the patient aware of their unhelpful thinking and reframing these reflections into a more neutral interpretation. Removing the adverse emotion allows for a more hopeful frame of reference. CBT has a strong research evidence base for management of chronic pain conditions, including migraines³⁰.

Medical hypnosis is another well-researched intervention that has been shown to lessen pain, with potential benefit for migraines³¹⁻³³. This strategy uses focused awareness and imagery to decrease or block pain via the subconscious mind. At times an unconscious block or past trauma may be contributing to the problem. If this is the case, an exploration using a trance state to enhance insight or resolve conflict may be beneficial. Otherwise, the hypnosis session focuses on direct and indirect suggestions to modify pain. The unconscious mind may be instructed to reinterpret, minimize, or turn off the pain. The therapist uses metaphor, focusing on qualities such as color, texture, and temperature, to dilute or modulate the pain. Such metaphors may include imagery of turning down a dial from a high to low setting, a vice unwinding or loosening, or color changing from hot red to cool blue. Like other mind-body activities, it is important to practice outside of therapy. A posthypnotic suggestion helps patients get back into a trance or relaxed state and employ the techniques such as imagery on their own. This conditions them to reenter the hypnotic state as needed to be comfortable.

Mindfulness practice: Mindfulness has been defined as “paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment without judgment or reaction”³⁴. Mindfulness practice assists individuals with the cultivation of body awareness, which can be helpful in identifying prodromal symptoms to a migraine. Prodromal symptoms mark the start of a migraine but occur prior to the onset of pain. Examples include sensitivity to light, sound or noise, excessive yawning or fatigue, neck pain or stiffness, mood swings, food cravings, and excessive hunger³⁵. When prodromal symptoms are identified, migraineurs are able to choose abortive treatments to treat the migraine sooner and more effectively. Dr. Kelly Beck, a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction teacher at the Center, uses regular mindfulness meditation to manage her chronic migraines. Kelly notes that mindfulness does not necessarily change her pain or symptoms once a full-blown migraine occurs, but it cultivates awareness of subtle signs of an impending migraine. This identification is critical to catch and utilize treatments to prevent the onset of pain, ultimately aborting the migraine before it becomes severe. For Kelly, mindfulness has been life-changing by allowing her to take control of her migraines.

Continued on page 4...

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Events & Groups

EXPERIENCE THE POSITIVE HEALTH EFFECTS OF TAI CHI

Would you like to improve your circulation, coordination, posture, balance, and strength?

If so, join Jon Wilson for Tai Chi classes at the
Center for Integrative Medicine!

Classes are for beginners as well as those already familiar with the practice of Tai Chi. The curriculum is based on the Wu Style I6 Posture Essential (Short) Form and is both accessible and beneficial to those of all fitness levels. The slow, deliberate Martial Art can aide stress and pain management by improving mind-body awareness, and re-training the body to relax while moving as well as standing. Wu Style Tai Chi relies on more naturally spaced stances and is well suited for those that have flexibility limitations or injuries to work around/recover from.



Jon is the Assistant Instructor at Steel Dragon Martial Arts in Lawrenceville. He also teaches an after-school Kung Fu program at Reserve Primary School in Shaler, as well as ongoing Tai Chi classes at Shepherd Wellness in Bloomfield, and community centered classes in Edgewood. He trains and teaches in several different styles of Kung Fu including: Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan, Ying Jow Kuen, and Xing-Yi Quan. In 2012, he became the Senior Disciple of Chris Young under the Yin Cheng Gong Fa lineage.

Tuesdays
Starting April 9th
5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
\$15 drop-in

Extensive research has been conducted around the benefits of Tai Chi, which include:

- improved balance and coordination
- decreased pain and limitations for individuals with arthritis
- improved flexibility and strength
- improvement in the heart and lung systems
- improved mood and sense of well-being

Call the Center for Integrative Medicine at **412-623-1203** to reserve a spot and/or for more information.

Conversations on Energy Medicine: Meridians & Vibrant Health



2nd WEDNESDAYS

Center for Integrative Medicine

May 8th & June 12th

2:00pm - 4:00pm

\$20 per session

By working with Energy Meridians we are able to maximize vibrant health in all phases of our life!

- ~ Practice working with your own Meridians for balancing health
- ~ Energetic meditations for alignment of body, mind, & spirit
- ~ Ask questions you may have about Energy Work

Kate Sherman is the SHIATSU PRACTITIONER at UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine in Shadyside & Cloud Gate Pittsburgh. Her journey into Energy Medicine has included extensive training with various Shiatsu Masters including: Stephanie Ulmer, AOBTA, Pauline Sasaki, the founder of Quantum Shiatsu, Suzanne Yates, of Wellmother Shiatsu, UK, & Winter Jade Forest of Zen Shiatsu Chicago. Additionally, Kate holds a Master's Degree in



Counseling Psychology from Chatham University. With over 10 years of clinical experience in the field of Energy Medicine, Kate brings a wealth of knowledge & experience to her practice and teachings.

Questions: 412-327-5719 (call or text)
Pre-registration requested, Drop ins welcome!



Ayurveda and Sex: How To Stoke The Fires!

Monday, May 13th, 2019 ~ 6:00pm – 7:30pm ~ \$10.00

Center for Integrative Medicine Classroom

Having a healthy libido is vital to a happy life. A robust libido is not just great for sex; it plays an important role in our mental health, fuels creativity, and passion and can make us feel younger and more alive, even in our later years. There are a number of lifestyle factors that affect the libido, and many of the choices you make on a daily basis either stoke the fire or douse the flames. Come learn safe, effective and natural ways to increase your libido with Kerry Harling, Ayurveda Practitioner.



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Integrative Management of Migraines

Continued from page 2...

Conclusion: We find the combination of traditional medical approaches, lifestyle modification, and complementary therapies to be helpful for our patients with migraines and other headache difficulties. When considering where to start, it's important to include self-management in the toolkit, particularly around lifestyle, diet, stress management, and exercise. Any other treatments, when added in, are likely to have a stronger and more lasting benefit. Commonly, people will find the greatest benefit from a combination of approaches, as illustrated in this account by the Center's Medical Director, Ronald Glick, MD.

After a year of preparations for a 4-day hike, I found myself asleep in a tent at the foot of the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Having had 6 migraines in my life and entering my 7th decade, I was due. When the headache started, I knew what was coming. After raiding the first aid kit for ibuprofen, with the headache continuing to escalate, I began to panic. The fact that the prior headaches were all time-limited, didn't stop my catastrophizing, with thoughts including: "The campfire has given me carbon monoxide poisoning; this is never going to go away; I'll be a mess for the whole hike." Between meds finally kicking in, self-CBT, self-Shiatsu, and meditation, after 3 hours I got back to sleep and awoke with the pain a not so distant memory.

2019 Classes at the UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

Tuesdays starting 4/9	5:00-6:00	Positive Effects with Tai Chi	\$15	Jon Wilson
Wednesdays 5/8—6/26	6:30-9:00	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (8 classes)	\$325	Carol Greco, PhD
Wednesday 5/8	2:00-4:00	Conversations on Energy Medicine	\$20	Kate Sherman
Monday 5/13	6:00-7:30	Ayurveda and Sex: How To Stoke The Fires!	\$10	Kerry Harling
Wednesday 6/12	2:00-4:00	Conversations on Energy Medicine	\$20	Kate Sherman

In Judeo-Christian culture, the performance of good deeds is one of our main tasks in life. In Jewish scripture, an anonymous donation is among the highest forms of good deeds or *mitzvot* a person can do.

The Center for Integrative Medicine and the Shadyside Hospital Foundation gratefully acknowledge the generous donation of an anonymous contributor. Karl Holtzer, MD is a pediatrician and functional medicine physician. This grant will provide support to offset costs over 1 year for consultation and management by Dr. Holtzer for children, adolescents, and young adults (ages 3-24) with autistic spectrum disorder.

If you would like to support this or any of the programs at CIM, please contact <https://shadysidehospitalfoundation.org/>. Your generosity will help us continue our mission of extending the benefits of integrative therapies to patients and families with limited means.

UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine Team

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