

# Migraine Awareness Week: Health tips and facts

Published by [www.femalefirst.co.uk/](http://www.femalefirst.co.uk/) (by Taryn Davies) on September 9, 2014



Migraine affects 1 in 7 people in the UK and has been classified as a major health disorder by the World Health Organization, rated among the top 20 most disabling lifetime conditions.

For many sufferers attacks are debilitating and stubborn, with painkillers having little effect. With this in mind, and **Migraine Awareness Week (7<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> September) taking place**, we've been speaking to different experts for their advice.

Here an Acupuncturist at London Bridge Hospital ([www.londonbridgehospital.com](http://www.londonbridgehospital.com)) talks about how taking an alternative path can be a successful means of managing your migraine.

Guidelines published by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) revealed that 1 in 50 people experience headaches as a result of overusing painkillers, and recommended a number of treatment options including acupuncture.

**Dr Martin Jones, Medical Acupuncturist at Sevenoaks Medical Centre (part of London Bridge Hospital) explains:** "Acupuncture can be very effective for the prevention of migraine. The treatment involves inserting fine needles into the scalp, neck, and other points on the body." While acupuncture is often seen as an 'alternative' medicine and therefore its efficacy is often debated, trials show that it can be very successful. Dr Jones expands: "The evidence consistently shows that over half of people with migraine will experience at least a 50% reduction in the number of days with headaches following a course of acupuncture."

Acupuncture is not an instant cure for migraine sufferers; several sessions are usually needed for results to come into effect. Dr Jones explains: "The effect is cumulative, so a 'trial' of treatment usually involves a session every week for six weeks. If there is an improvement, further 'top-up' treatments can be given at increasing intervals. NICE guidelines recommend a course of 10 treatments. For some people, the interval between these top-up treatments can be extended progressively (up to a few months in many cases)."

"Acupuncture is very safe and is suitable for most people" Dr Jones assures. "This makes it an attractive alternative to other preventatives such as medication which often has to be taken for life and can cause unwelcome side effects."

**British Acupuncture Council member and acupuncturist says:** "Acupuncture helps chronic headaches and migraine by treating both the painful and debilitating symptoms at the moment they occur, as well as the underlying root cause in the long term. The root cause may be a deficiency in the body, typically exacerbated by overwork, working long hours, burning the candle at either ends or a lack of proper rest and nourishing food. Acupuncture uses ultra fine needles to boost the Qi or energy in the body. Topping up this energy is what reduces the frequency, severity and susceptibility to headaches or migraine."

*To find a registered acupuncturist in your area contact the British Acupuncture Council, an accredited member of the Professional Standards Authority on 020 8735 0400 or visit [www.acupuncture.org.uk](http://www.acupuncture.org.uk)*

**Professor Bruce Evans, Fellow of the College of Optometrists and Director of Research at the Institute of Optometry says:**

“People can get [migraines](#) or headaches for a variety of different reasons such as hormonal factors, stress, or a particular food or drink. However many people seem to forget that another key trigger can be their vision.

For example, some people who are more light-sensitive find that contrasting colours or repetitive patterns can trigger [migraines](#) – this could include black words on a white background, stripes on a shirt, the lines on an escalator or flickering lights. This is because these patterns can overexcite the visual part of the brain, overloading it and in some cases triggering migraine.

Vision-related migraines are most often suffered by children, teenagers and young adults, as the brain’s sensitivity can decrease with age. The good news is that if your migraines are triggered by visual factors then your optometrist may be able to help prevent some of the migraines. For example many optometry practices will have a piece of equipment called an ‘intuitive colorimeter’ which they can use to prescribe glasses with coloured lenses which patients can put on when they are exposed to visual triggers. Research using brain imaging (fMRI) indicates that the coloured filters quieten down the over-activity in the visual part of the brain.”

**Professor Evans’s advice for people who are worried about their headaches or migraines:**

- If you find that you experience headaches after looking at a computer, reading, or doing other close up work, your headache may be vision-related so seek advice from your optometrist
- Children who come home from school complaining of headaches may be experiencing eye strain; seek advice from your optometrist if you notice this in your child
- If you experience migraines try to keep a diary of when you’re getting them to help you identify triggers. If you notice that your migraines come on when you are exposed to fluorescent lights (for example in an office or supermarket), flickering lights or stripes, then they may be vision-related
- For people who have problems working in offices or other environments that have fluorescent lighting; try to get more natural light as some people have found that this helps with their vision-related migraines.