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The holidays for many are "the most wonderful time of the year." For migraine suffers though, stress, overindulgence in food and alcohol, travel, and change in sleep patterns and normal daily routine, which are all common occurrences during the holiday season, are triggers for migraine. How can you enjoy this wonderful time of year and stay headache free? Here are some best bets to stay migraine free during the holidays:

Plan Ahead

Many people tend to wait until the last minute to deal with holiday stressors such as shopping, cooking, and making travel or party plans. If stress is usually a culprit in your arsenal of migraine triggers, take some time out to pre-plan your holiday tasks and festivities. Don't let shopping, party preparations, cooking, family time etc. pile on top of each other. Get your shopping done early and prepare holiday dinners in advance (or order something from a restaurant or caterer).

Don't Alter your Normal Routines

Eat regularly, go to bed at the same time and wake-up at the same time every day. If you normally drink coffee every morning, don't stop right before the holidays! If you exercise four days a week, try to keep it up around the holidays. Regular exercise diminishes the chances that headaches will become worse, and being overweight may be linked to excess estrogen, a potent trigger for migraines in women, so keep your normal exercise routine going.

Travel Wisely

If you are travelling during the holidays, flying at night or through different time zones, try to keep your routines/schedules unchanged as much as possible. Take your medications with you on the airplane, drink plenty of fluids to keep yourself well hydrated, and try to keep sleep patterns as true to your normal routine as possible. Melatonin, an herbal supplement sold over the counter, may help with changes in sleep patterns, especially during travel.

Avoid Potent Smells

If strong perfumes trigger your migraines, let your guests (or family members) know; perhaps they might consider avoiding it for that night. Also, if you know the host/hostess of a party well enough, you may consider discussing this with him/her ahead of your arrival. If the chemical smell of the hair salon or cleaning products triggers a migraine, have your hair done well before the holiday hits and opt for non-toxic, fragrance free cleaners.

Stress Let-Down Headaches

Some migraineurs experience stress let-down headaches, that is, migraines that begin after the stressor is finally gone. This means that the headaches may not come until after the holiday, so continue those healthy migraine-minded behaviors for at least a few days after the holiday, too.

Tricky Triggers

Migraineurs should know that triggers often need to be in multiples before a headache will occur. For this reason, they can be difficult to identify. The upside of that, is that sometimes, if you are aware that one or two potential triggers are present, you can be more vigilant about avoiding the third or fourth (the straw that breaks the camel's back). For instance, red wine may not trigger your migraines on most days, but if you haven't slept well, and a big storm is coming (both potential triggers), then you may find that wine will trigger a headache under those circumstances. Once you know that, you can avoid wine only during those times. So if you are sleeping well during the holidays and no bad weather is on the horizon, you may be free to have your glass of wine. This is only an example, each individual is different.

Keep a Calendar

Start by keeping a calendar and noting when you get your headaches and identify any possible triggers that might have been a factor. Every month, review your calendar. It may take a few months for patterns to emerge, so don't get too distraught if nothing comes of it at first.

<u>Common migraine triggers include</u>: wine/red wine/alcohol, MSG, weather changes (changes in temperature or barometric pressure), lack of sleep or too much sleep, lack of caffeine or too much caffeine, aged cheeses, nitrates, deli meats/sausage, stress, skipped meals, hormonal fluctuations, smells.

About Dr. Halpern and Manhattan Headache and Neurology

After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine with her MD, Dr. Audrey Halpern completed an internship in internal medicine at Yale University, along with her neurology residency training at Yale. Following her stay at Yale, she completed fellowship training in headache medicine at the Jefferson Headache Center at the Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia. Dr. Halpern is board-certified in headache medicine by the United Council for Neurologic Subspecialties, and board certified in neurology by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Dr. Halpern, who is also a Clinical Assistant Professor of Neurology at New York University School of Medicine, diagnoses and treats a variety of neurological disorders, including headache, back pain, neck pain, pinched nerves, neuropathy, seizures, stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, and others conditions. In addition to treating adults, Dr. Halpern specializes in treating headache disorders in adolescents and pre-teens.

With a belief in a combination of treatments for migraines such as behavior modification, conventional medication and holistic approaches, Dr. Halpern offers unique, advanced methods to treating and preventing migraines. She has co-authored a book chapter on migraine and epilepsy, has also written numerous articles on the subject of migraine, and frequently lectures on headache and other neurology topics. Dr. Halpern practices concierge style care, offering in-practice visits at Manhattan Headache and Neurology in addition to house calls. Manhattan Headache and Neurology is located at 15 East 40th Street, Suite 201, New York, NY 10016, and Dr. Halpern can be reached at 646-648-3793, or through her website, www.ManhattanHeadache.com.