



15 East 40th Street, Suite 201  
New York, NY 10016  
646-648-3793  
www.audreyhalpernmd.com

Contact: Heidi Raker  
Raker Goldstein & Co.  
Phone: (201) 784-1818  
Fax: (201) 537-0462  
[heidi@rakergoldstein.com](mailto:heidi@rakergoldstein.com)

# NEWS

FOR RELEASE AT WILL

## **Common Holiday Foods May Trigger Holiday Migraines; Some Herbal Teas and Essential Oils May Relieve Migraine Symptoms and Pain**

### Women and Men Respond Differently to Triggers Like Chocolate and Wine

(Holiday 2010 – New York, NY) Foods and beverages commonly consumed during the holiday season may trigger, and conversely subdue migraine headaches, according to Audrey Halpern, MD, 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.

Tops on the food list for triggering migraines, according to Dr. Halpern, particularly amongst women, are:

- o Chocolate
- o Red wine, liquor and beer
- o Deli meats and sausage  
(due to their high sodium and nitrate content)
- o Aged cheese and dairy generally  
(stick with ricotta or cottage cheese)
- o Caffeine in large amounts  
(or smaller than usual amounts)
- o Nuts, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds,
- o sunflower seeds
- o Citrus fruits
- o Avocado
- o Figs and raisins
- o Overripe bananas
- o Olives and pickles
- o Yeast, fermented and pickled foods
- o Processed and sugar-laden foods
- o Anchovies
- o Soups made with bouillon
- o Meat tenderizer
- o Soy sauce
- o Paté
- o Caviar
- o Nutrasweet
- o Monosodium glutamate

"Additional triggers include weather changes (changes in temperature or barometric pressure), lack of sleep or too much sleep, stress, skipped meals, hormonal fluctuations and strong odors, including potpourri and perfume," said Dr. Halpern.

Conversely, studies have shown that peppermint oil, "when rubbed onto the temples can reduce migraine and pain generally," said Dr. Halpern in relation to a 1994 German study by H. Gobel<sup>1</sup>. "I recommend drinking relaxing herbal teas such as peppermint, valerian root, kava kava and chamomile to allay the pain associated with migraine and headache as well. The essential oils in peppermint and these other herbs help muscles relax and relaxation is a large factor in our experience of pain."

### It's a Gender Thing

It is a fact that women suffer migraines more than men. According to the UCLA Department of Neurology, women are three times more likely to have migraines than men and that 18-25% of the female population suffers from migraines<sup>1</sup>. These are widely known and accepted statements, but the question is, why are women more susceptible to migraine than men?

Chocolate, cheese, alcohol, and caffeine are all common triggers for migraine in both men and women, but the way they are metabolized in the body differs greatly in men and women. "For dietary and pharmacologic triggers (such as caffeine or alcohol), the same dose will affect men and women differently," says Dr. Kevin Sperber, assistant professor of Clinical Rehabilitation Medicine at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Dr. Desiree Thomas, a neurologist at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic in Houston, Texas points out that the way male brain processes pain information is different than the way a female brain processes the same pain. Near identical symptoms can be present in a male and female, but it is the distinct way the brain perceives and reacts to pain that results in an awful migraine or fleeting headache. Social norms as well as biology may account for differences in the way men and women think about and talk about pain.

Studies have shown that women are more likely than men to seek care for pain, and that culturally it is more accepted for women to have pain complaints. Men are more likely to have a severe and disabling headache condition before seeking care from a physician. Studies show that when experiencing pain, the activity in women's brains is very strong in the emotional areas of the brain, and men's brains show more activity in the area that is responsible for personality expression, decision making and moderating correct social behavior.

A large portion of migraines are caused by brain excitability, and a brain reaction called cortical spreading depression (CSD). CSD is a dramatic wave of activity that spreads across the surface of the brain causing inflammation and pain. During this wave, blood flow increases and then decreases, and changes in the brain occur. These changes in the brain and in blood vessels are what cause not only migraine pain, but the other physical aspects of migraine including nausea, sensitivity to light and noise, and dizziness. In a lab study, it was found that females have a significantly lower threshold to CSD when compared to males in the study, meaning that if CSD brain excitability occurs, women are more likely to suffer the effects than men.

Menstruation is a notorious migraine trigger. Research shows that the primary trigger for migraine during menstruation may be the withdrawal of estrogen. "Just before your period, estrogen levels drop and this affects the brain's neurotransmitters and the sensitivity of the receptors that pick up their messages," says Dr. Judith Reichman, MD of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA. "Blood vessels dilate, nerves are sensitized and muscles go into spasm," thus causing the headache.

1. Gobel, H. "Effect of peppermint and eucalyptus oil preparations on neurophysiological and experimental algometric headache parameters". Cephalalgia 1994; 14: 228-34.

# # #

## 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. Dr. Halpern is also a member of the Brain Injury Association of New York State.*

*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 written numerous articles on the subject of migraine, frequently lectures on headache and other neurology topics, and is an expert in the field of concussion and sports related head injury. Dr. Halpern has appeared on Fox 5 NY and has been featured in Family Circle, Woman's Day, Town & Country, Health magazine, My Family Doctor, Big Apple Parent, the NFL radio network. Dr. Halpern is a health contributor to PositivelyParenting.com.*

*Dr. Halpern practices concierge style care, offering house calls in addition to visits at The Manhattan Center for Headache and Neurology. The Manhattan Center for Headache and Neurology is located at 15 East 40th Street, Suite 201, New York, NY 10016. Dr. Halpern can be reached at 646-648-3793, or through her website, [www.audreyhalpernmd.com](http://www.audreyhalpernmd.com).*

