

Regular exercise is helpful in preventing migraine attacks, as well as for supporting your physical and mental health and wellbeing. However, for over a third of people living with migraine, vigorous exercise is also a trigger for migraine. And for most people living with migraine, exercising during an attack will worsen their symptoms. People who only get attacks when exercising may be diagnosed with Exercise Induced Migraine.

If you live with Exercise Induced Migraine, this is probably something you worked out for yourself. Several mechanisms may cause Exercise Induced Migraine. These include alterations in brainstem neuropeptide pathways, a rise in cardiac output and blood pressure, an increase in blood lactate, and activation of peripheral nerves in the trigeminal complex.

Sports related head trauma, for example, being struck by a ball, can also induce migraine attacks.

Neck pain is more commonly reported as the first symptom of migraine attack in people living with migraine who also get Exercise Induced Migraine. Although the reason for this is not clear, it may be due to activation of upper cervical nerve fibres.

Did you know?

Talk to your doctor about your plans to change how you exercise, rather than just not exercising. You may be eligible for a referral to an exercise physiologist under a chronic care plan to help you work out the best way to exercise and manage your migraine.

Exercise can help manage migraine

There is increasing scientific evidence that regular exercise can help manage your migraine. Exercise suppresses inflammation and stress hormones, and also helps psychologically by helping you to feel good and in control.

Regular exercise may result in:

- Fewer migraine days
- Less intense migraine attacks
- Shorter migraine attacks
- Reducing your need for medication

Treating Exercise Induced Migraine

If you have frequent exercise induced migraine, speak to your neurologist about adding a headache preventer to treat your background head pain.

Trigger avoidance is a good strategy; however, you don't have to avoid exercise entirely. Here are some tips to help you to exercise without triggering an attack:

- Avoid high impact activity (especially HIIT), or any activity that needs a great or sudden burst of physical exertion.
- Do long warm-ups and cooldowns.
- Consider lower-impact sports, like yoga and swimming, over higher intensity sports like boxing or football.
- Stay well hydrated and if possible cool – exercising indoors in an airconditioned environment may be best.



CATH
EXERCISE INDUCED MIGRAINE
MELBOURNE, VIC

BB After 30 years I have finally learned that I have exercise induced migraine! I get migraine attacks after exercise no matter how much water I drink. It has discouraged me from doing sport as it's getting worse as I get older. JJ

Exercise-induced migraine is more likely to occur in people who are exercising in hot, humid weather, or at high altitudes. Stretching based exercises such as light yoga may be better tolerated than walking or running whereby the movements can trigger throbbing head pain.



This fact sheet was clinically reviewed by Dr Lakshini Gunasekera (BBMed, MD, FRACP)