

Madeline Hearst  
Berkeley Herbal Center- Therapeutics Program  
Pathology Report, June 2019

## **Migraine: Causation, Prevention, Relief, and New Ways of Healing**

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to open up a discussion and approach the conversation of migraine in a different way. This paper will include background on migraine including causes, symptoms, common treatments, and will also look into the many other body systems that are closely interrelated to the experience of migraine. In terms of prevention and treatment, various alternative therapies will be discussed, in addition to a handful of different herbs that can be used for support and relief. Beyond that, I will also touch upon other more psychological facets of migraine, including how to experience and relate to the pain, emotional components of migraine, as well as what can be learned from experiencing migraine and looking into new ways of healing. In short, this paper is not a shotgun approach to healing or a quick fix that will treat each different person and their symptoms. Rather, the aim of this report is to look deeper into the experience of and meaning behind migraine, and how to apply various means of healing on not only a physical level, but also a spiritual, emotional, and psychological level. This paper is an invitation to listen and learn from the pain and suffering that migraine can bring, and work with it, not against it, to elevate our health and overall wellbeing. Each migraine sufferer has their own path, their own journey, and their own unique ways of working with and healing this loud message from the body. This paper is meant to not only educate, but empower and open up new doors and ways of approaching this topic to migraine sufferers, supporters of migraine sufferers, or anyone else who has an interest in this topic.

## Table of Contents

Personal Account of Migraine.....	4
Migraine Statistics.....	6
Phases of Migraine.....	7
Visit to Neurologist.....	10
Lifestyle & Dietary Protocols.....	12
Stress Awareness.....	15
Additional Resources.....	16
Anatomy of Pain.....	16
Holistic View of Herbal Treatment.....	17
Herbal Remedies.....	18
In Summary & Conclusion.....	26
Bibliography.....	28

The return of a familiar feeling, a subtle nagging feeling deep in the head behind the eyes, sometimes on the left and sometimes on the right. But always a certain side. At the start, it's hard to decipher if the slight nagging discomfort is even present or not, but I start to get a dreaded feeling in my stomach. At that point, I typically carry on with my day, hoping that maybe just this once, the nagging feeling will fade instead of progress. As the minutes and hours tick by, this nagging feeling becomes slowly more intense, more significant, and soon it begins to overpower me. I'm still able to carry on, but it's especially bad when I move too quickly or go from sitting to standing, I wince in discomfort and let the waves of pain crash over and through my head. At this point, I'm also becoming increasingly sensitive to light, especially the blaring artificial frequency of a fluorescent bulb. By now, hardly anything can stop the pain, the pain gripping my head is so severe that the only thing I can do is try to make my way home as quickly as I can to lay down. The only relief is to try and drift off to sleep and let the pain continue to overtake me as I sleep. At this point I also wonder why I am doing this to myself, why am I finally "allowing myself" to actually feel the pain, to experience the 6-12+ hours of misery and overwhelming discomfort that migraine brings. Why am I halting my day to find solace in sleep, in darkness? Why not numb it out?

Although I've suffered from headaches for at least 12 years, that's as far back as I can remember, and have specifically suffered from migraines for at least the last 5 years, I didn't always handle them this way. For years, as soon as I would start to feel the ever-so-slight nagging feeling in my head on one side, I would instantly reach for my bottle of ibuprofen. In fact, I had bottles of ibuprofen everywhere, my car, my desk, my

backpack, my bathroom. Wherever I went, so too did that bottle of pills. As soon as I felt any discomfort at all, I would instantly swallow down 800 milligrams of ibuprofen to numb it out. While this often times did succeed in taking away the pain and discomfort I was feeling, it did not take away the migraine itself, only my body's perception of the pain it was bringing. In fact, I also noticed that over time, my pain tolerance and threshold was actually weakening since I was so disconnected from the experience and sensation of pain and discomfort. My migraines did not lessen in frequency, the only thing that the ibuprofen was doing was numbing my perception of it, constantly making me feel like I had succeeded and beat it, until one day, this tactic no longer worked for me and my entire perception shifted.

During the summer of 2015, I experienced an excruciating migraine episode that lasted five days. During this episode, all my usual medicines did not work at all, I was in severe, relentless pain non-stop for five days, went to the hospital twice, and could hardly eat or communicate. The only periods of relief I could find during that time was sleep, the pain itself did not subside, but I was able to sleep through the pain. This was an extremely taxing time, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well. While this migraine episode was incredibly difficult to experience and process, I also learned a lot and it ended up being extremely transformative. It also took me a while to recover and return to "normal". What was particularly interesting about this migraine episode, was that I could pinpoint exactly the cause, although it took me a while to figure it out. About 24 hours before the onset of the migraine, I had a very difficult emotional experience. Without going into too much detail, I had a very difficult

conversation with a family member whom I had a very difficult relationship with. It was one of the most brutally honest conversations I've had to have with someone. I let out a lot of deeply pent up anger, frustration, and repressed emotions. I felt relieved afterwards, but also felt sick to my stomach.

The reason I even bring this up, was that previously, I had only thought of migraine as a purely physical or random experience, I had not even considered that it could be brought on by an emotional cause, and how closely my emotions were tied to this particular extreme migraine. As I processed and recovered from my migraine over the following days and weeks, I began to wonder if this had to be more than a "random" occurrence, that there had to be more of an answer as to why I was prone to headaches and migraines besides that I was "unlucky". I realized that there had to be a wide array of factors swirling about in my life (physical, environmental, emotional, psychological, etc), that were contributing to my condition. While it was quite honestly easier to feel like I was a victim of this condition and there was simply nothing I could do but maybe get rid of the pain once it struck, I felt so much more hopeful and empowered knowing that there were most likely factors that were causing this to occur that I was at least in large part responsible for, and with that, that I could also potentially do the work and make changes to my life and my health to improve my condition.

While headaches are a fairly common and widespread condition, and there are many different types of headaches, I will mainly be focusing on specifically migraine for this discussion. Millions of people suffer from migraines, but what exactly defines a migraine? "The name *migraine* is given to a recurrent, throbbing headache of variable

duration, intensity, and frequency, a headache that is often preceded by visual disturbances and accompanied by irritability, aversion to light and sound, nausea, and occasionally vomiting”.<sup>1</sup> It took me a long time to admit that my headaches were not just headaches, but migraines. I was in denial for so long, and for years was numbing out the pain from my initial headache, that I had no idea how severe my experiences really were. The pain from my migraines, once I began to experience them for what they were without masking the symptom of the pain, often times led to nausea and vomiting, as well as extreme aversion to light. For me at least, the pain always starts out dull, barely noticeable most times, and slowly intensifies over a period of hours, and typically lasts about 12 hours or more. Again, one of the only consistent ways for me to feel relief to is to sleep, which is often times hard to do when the pain is so severe, but is often the only time I can catch a break from the nauseating, splitting pain. The pain from my migraines also always originates on one side or the other, typically above my eye and lower forehead, deep into my skull, on either the right or left side. Just as the migraines come on slowly and build over time, as do they slowly fade in intensity until I feel pain-free again. Although typically, I also experience a “hangover” sensation for at least a day or more afterward when I experience brain fog, exhaustion, and a feeling of heaviness or slowness.

With migraines, there are three common stages; premonitory period, pain period (during), and the postdrome. While not every migraineur will experience three distinct phases, this is a widely known component to the process of migraine, and within

---

<sup>1</sup> Low, R. Victory Over Migraine: The Breakthrough Study That Explains What Causes It and How It Can Be Completely Prevented. 1987.

each stage of a migraine, there can be a wide array of symptoms. The premonitory phase typically occurs before the onset of pain, before the migraine actually “strikes”. The premonitory period can occur from days to hours before the pain period, and as one begins to navigate their pain and their process, there are typically common symptoms that one experiences before the migraine attack. This wasn’t always easy for me to pinpoint, and even to this day, it is tough for me to predict when I will experience my next migraine. I began tracking my migraines by simply writing down the date, and the level of severity, which overtime I was able to classify for myself. As time went on, I also added more “notes” to my tracker, including the day of the week, time of day, what I had eaten or drank throughout the day, what part of my cycle I was on, the phase of the moon, and my general mood. While it’s still an evolving process for me to build more awareness of when my next migraine may strike, the first step in this process was simply taking “inventory” of what was happening in my body and my life during those times. It also showed me the stark reality of just how frequently I was suffering from headaches and migraines, much more than I thought before I began keeping track of them.

After the premonitory phase, the pain phase begins to take hold. The three phases blend into one another, as opposed to being three distinct experiences. For me at least, my migraines often times come on very subtly, and get progressively worse over a number of hours. During the pain period, migraines can last from hours to days, and can become quite severe and intense. During this time, the migraineur can also become sensitive to noise and light, it can become difficult to hold conversation, they



become weak, and can also experience nausea, vomiting, and appetite loss<sup>2</sup>. Most commonly for me, my migraines last about 8-12 hours, but I have experienced a migraine that lasted five days, with a week long postdrome period as well. I also occasionally will get the onset of a migraine, and it will only progress to a moderate (“tolerable”) level of pain and intensity before easing up, but that is on rare occasion. There are also other body symptom signs that occur during the pain period such as irritability, anxiety, frequent yawning (this can also occur before the migraine attack), goose bumps, facial swelling, and cold extremities. Each person can experience different signs and symptoms, so it is important to take note and recall various aspects of how you felt both before and during the migraine.<sup>3</sup>

The third phase of a migraine is called the “postdrome” phase, and typically refers to the 24 hours after the migraine, but can have lasting effects for days after. “Many people experience fatigue or depression during the postdrome. Others have an opposite experience, reporting feelings of euphoria or intense well-being. Other commonly reported post-headache effects include poor concentration, reduced physical activity, and frequent yawning.”<sup>4</sup> For most people, the migraine isn’t over just when the pain fades away, although that is an incredible relief. It is important to be cognizant of postdrome symptoms and the lingering effects of migraine on the body and mind. I didn’t even know the postdrome period was recognized and had always wondered why I felt “off” after experiencing migraines. I’ve experienced both ends of the postdrome

---

<sup>2</sup> Constantine, M, Scott, S, The American Council for Headache Education. Migraine The Complete Guide: A Comprehensive Resource Book for People with Migraine, Their Families, and Physicians. 1994. P50-53.

<sup>3</sup> Constantine, M, Scott, S, The American Council for Headache Education. Migraine The Complete Guide: A Comprehensive Resource Book for People with Migraine, Their Families, and Physicians. 1994. P50-53.

<sup>4</sup> Constantine, M, Scott, S, The American Council for Headache Education. Migraine The Complete Guide: A Comprehensive Resource Book for People with Migraine, Their Families, and Physicians. 1994. P54

spectrum, both lingering brain fog, melancholy and a feeling of being slow and dull, as well as an incredible sense of emotional release and a feeling of “lightness”, especially after coming out of a 12 hour pain period. No matter what type of postdrome effects I experience, after experiencing a migraine, I also am so thankful for just not being in constant pain and realize how often I take that for granted. Over time, I’ve come to realize the importance of acknowledging and dealing with the pain of migraine in a positive and beneficial way, and how that has helped propel me forward on my healing journey. I didn’t always have that point of view, however, and I first had to wade through my own process of discovering what approach did and did not work for me.

Another big turning point in my process was after my five day migraine episode when I went to go see a neurologist as I was recovering. I thought he would have all the answers, would have an incredible treatment plan for me, and would definitely be able to help solve my long lasting condition, as well as help explain what had caused my multi-day migraine. I also wanted to be sure that I did not have a more serious underlying condition causing the pain in my head, so I also needed reassurance and for him to confirm the results from my MRI scan while I was in the hospital. During my appointment, the doctor didn’t really have any answers as to what may be causing my migraines, and threw out a statistic and made it seem like it was a random, episodic occurrence that affects “x” number of people. He also prescribed me four different medications, two of them to deal with the pain once a headache or migraine occurred, one additional medication to suppress any nausea from a migraine, but what I was most excited by was that he had also prescribed me another medication as a preventative

treatment. What I wasn't expecting was that this "preventative" treatment for my migraines was a prescription anti-depressant medication. I soon found myself taking this antidepressant each day, and once again had my purse, backpack, car, desk, etc stocked with a plethora of pills and packages, in case another migraine struck.

While I did walk away from the neurologist appointment hopeful that my migraines may go away, I still felt there was a huge piece of the puzzle that had been completely overlooked, and it was at this point that I actually decided to read up on all of my medications and how they worked in the body, since I still continued to get frequent headaches and migraines, and something didn't feel quite right. At least for me, walking around with a backstock of various pills wasn't enough for me, especially since the frequency of my headaches was only increasing, and I truly felt that it wasn't the migraines and the pain itself that was the issue, but that there was an underlying imbalance in my body that was then triggering and causing the migraines to occur. At this point, I was finished simply masking the pain with pills and decided from then on, to experience the migraines to their full extent (severe pain and all), so I could really start to tune in to the messages I was receiving from my body to get to the root cause. I decided to take my healing into my own hands, and also realized at that point that there wasn't going to be a single pill, a single trick, or a single magic bullet that would solve this. I also realized that I couldn't just passively expect a pill to solve my problems. What I had been avoiding, but knew I needed to do, was be an active participant in my healing. A pill wasn't going to do it for me, I would have to do the work, make the

commitment, try new ways of living, in order to solve my own imbalances. While yes, this would take a lot of “work”, I also felt more empowered, and more hopeful.

Now that I have covered a basic overview of migraine and shared in-depth about my own experience, I now want to shift focus to some lifestyle, dietary, and herbal protocols to help prevent migraines, support the body, and in some cases, reduce pain and discomfort associated with a migraine episode. I’m writing about a list of recommendations that have helped me personally, and once again, am encouraging others to do their own research, tune in to their own body, and discover which therapies work best for you, as there is no single shotgun approach. I will also outline a few resources and theories that have been immensely helpful in my understanding of and treatment of my migraines, and will point readers to other resources for more in-depth explanations, as this report is simply meant to be a basic overview to get people started on their own healing journey and investigations.

I feel that one of the most important pillars for migraine prevention is diet. Once I realized that prescription medications I had been given weren’t actually doing anything to heal my recurring condition, I was then hoping to find a more natural herbal remedy that would do the trick. I soon learned that a single herbal medicine would not solve my problems either, and this led me further along my healing path and in fact, gave me so much more. I found that there were a large handful of lifestyle, diet, and herbal remedies that would help support the many interconnected body systems and help to bring balance to my body, as I felt that the migraines I was experiencing were symptoms of imbalances occurring in my body, leading to episodic pain.

For me, one of the biggest dietary changes that leads to imbalance causing migraine is an overconsumption of carbohydrates and glucose. So the variance and spike in blood sugar, as well as the sensitivity I have to glucose, can trigger migraines, as well as an excess of cortisol in my body. Diet was a hard piece for me to work on, and is still something I am continually working on, and throughout my entire life, my diet has been high in carbohydrate and glucose-spiking foods, ever since I was a small child, much in line with the Standard American Diet (SAD). A book recommendation that really helped me grasp this framework and implement some changes in my own life was Rodolfo Low's book, "Victory Over Migraine"<sup>5</sup>. I've also moved towards eating lots more healthy fats, consuming a protein and fat-rich meal in the morning, and also making sure I don't go too many hours between meals, and try to eat every 2-3 hours. I've also included more cinnamon into my diet, as this herb is not only moistening and gently warming, but also helps stabilize blood sugar levels and helps reduce cravings.

Another aspect of diet that is critically important in reducing and preventing migraines is hydration. I used to think that hydration simply meant water. While water is the foundation of hydration, there are also two other critically important components of hydration; oil hydration and electrolyte balance. Starting with water, I aim to drink at least 9 glasses of water per day, but this of course varies person to person, and also depends on the climate you're in and exercise intensity or fluids lost through sweat. I try to drink a full 8oz glass of water immediately upon waking, as well as

---

<sup>5</sup> Low, R. Victory Over Migraine: The Breakthrough Study That Explains What Causes It and How It Can Be Completely Prevented. 1987.

consistently throughout the day. Even with drinking a sufficient amount of water, I still was prone to getting headaches and would still always wake up thirsty in the morning and still felt dry overall; dry skin, dry eyes, dry mouth, etc. What has helped me greatly is not just paying attention to hydration through water, but also focusing primarily on electrolyte balance and deep cellular hydration. I highly recommend the book by Dr. Angela Stanton called “Fighting the Migraine Epidemic” as she outlines this in much detail and an entire paper could be written just on this topic, but I just wanted to call this out and provide a starting point for others to research further<sup>6</sup>. What I’ve begun to implement into my daily routine is adding 1/8 tsp of salt to an 8oz glass of water and drinking that about 30 minutes before bed, as well as first thing in the morning, I even keep the salt and water right next to my bed. Another herbal ally that I’ve found has helped keep me hydrated and nourished is Marshmallow root. One of my favorite ways to consume this plant is as a cold infusion. I’ll put a few tablespoons of Marshmallow Root and a dash of cinnamon into a quart size mason jar, room temp water over it, and let it sit overnight. Sometimes I’ll also add Chamomile too, which is also slightly cooling, deeply nourishing and hydrating as a cold infusion. Lastly, I also focus on oil hydration. All of our cells and nerves are coated in oil, and in order to be deeply hydrated and nourished, we not only need water, but also healthy fats and oils. Also, a lot of nutrients are fat-soluble so consuming adequate amounts of fats is crucial for proper hydration.

Before going into more detail about specific herbal remedies for headache relief, as well as outlining the various body systems potentially related to the cause and

---

<sup>6</sup> Stanton, A. Fighting the Migraine Epidemic Complete Guide: How to Treat & Prevent Migraines Without Medications. 2017.

frequency of migraine and various herbal protocols to help restore and bring balance, I also want to briefly touch on some other lifestyle recommendations that can be helpful to a migraineur, aside from diet and hydration mentioned above. In general, I feel that I carry around a lot of excess tension, both in the body and in the mind, and one thing I really focus on for migraine prevention is calming and quieting the body and mind.

Again, there could be (and probably are) books written about each on these individual topics, so I just wanted to mention a few here and point the reader to further resources that I've found to be extremely helpful. First and foremost is sleep, both getting enough sleep each night, and if you feel a migraine coming on or are in the midst of a migraine, try to get some rest and hopefully sleep. I've found this to be the best method for both dealing with the pain, and helping to recover. Stress is a big word these days, but can still tend to be overlooked. I used to think of stress just as concrete events or scenarios playing out in daily life (finances, work, family, errands etc....), but I never realized that stress is also the nervous system state of 'fight or flight', which can even be engaged when we don't even realize it. It's important to check in with yourself as you're going about your day and take note of things that bring you out of balance, even if they are really subtle, that can cause a build-up of excess stress. For me, some simple examples of this were, constantly realizing I breathe very shallow, especially at work and while driving, my alarm going off in the morning, gripping the steering wheel too hard and rigid while driving, responding to tons of emails and multi-tasking at work, etc. While these instances will always be routine parts of daily life that can't typically be avoided, the key is to realize certain situations that make you tense or cause very subtle levels of stress,

and work with that by taking deep breaths and clearing the mind of excess chatter when possible, so those day-to-day encounters are no longer as draining on the body and mind.

A few other resources that have really helped for me are breathwork, stretching and gentle natural movement exercises, mindfulness, and tension releasing self-massage. Instead of taking a deep dive into these topics here in this report, I'd encourage anyone who is interested in any of the above topics to read any of these following resources:

- "The Headache Healer's Handbook: A Holistic, Hands-On Somatic Self-Care Program for Headache and Migraine Relief and Prevention" Jan Mundo
- "How To Breathe: 25 Simple Practices for Calm, Joy, and Resilience" Ashley Neese
- "The Practice of Natural Movement: Reclaim Power, Health, and Freedom" Erwan LeCorre

These resources go into much detail on breathwork, natural movement & mobility, as well as hands-on practices for relieving tension and pain.

In this next section I'd first like to give an overview of headache and migraine pain and the anatomy of pain in the brain. From there, I will outline some herbal remedies that can be used for both migraine prevention & relief, and will weave in how these herbs can also support other important body systems that are closely intertwined with headaches and migraines. It is important to note that "brain tissue itself is insensitive to pain, as is the bony covering of the cranium. Headache pain results from the stimulation of such pain-sensitive structures as the membraneous linings of the brain (the *meninges*) and the nerves of the cranium and upper neck. The stimulation



can be produced by inflammation, dilation of normal or abnormal blood vessels in the head, or muscle spasms in the neck and head”<sup>7</sup>. I had never really thought of how pain operated in the head or what specifically was causing headache and migraine pain, since for years, I had numbed it out with ibuprofen as soon as I felt the slightest sensation of a headache coming on. It wasn’t until I actually felt and experienced my headaches and migraines to their full extent that I was able to finally understand what was occurring in my body. While yes, migraine pain is very uncomfortable and can sometimes even feel severely painful, it has also been pivotal in my understanding of my condition and what sparked my interest in investigating and making changes to my life to overcome them. Whereas before, I was separated and disassociated with the experience I was having, once I let my migraines run their course naturally, I was able to much better perceive and comprehend what was going on. In the above description of how pain manifests in the head, it also helps give more context on the types of herbal remedies that can assist, as some target vasodilation, and others target tension, others target pain, etc.

To start, here is an overview of how herbs can support the body in general, specifically as it relates to headaches. David Hoffman gives a great overview of herbal treatment and protocol for headaches in his book, ‘Medical Herbalism’, while also noting that because migraine pain can stem from so many various reasons, treatment is different and varies greatly for everyone, and also notes that there are no straightforward “plant painkillers”, as we are conditioned to using, like OTC medications

---

<sup>7</sup> Hoffmann, D. Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine. 2003. P. 364.

and prescription medications. Using herbs for migraine prevention and relief more aims to prevent and get at the root cause of what's leading a migraine to strike in the first place, rather than just focusing on masking pain once it's already felt in the body. Referring to a list of common herbs that can be specific for headaches, Hoffmann writes, "None of these plants is a painkiller in the strict sense; this is, they do not block the direct experience of pain..The most effective plant painkillers are controlled by law, as they have the potential to lead to dependency and addiction. Because of this, it is often more effective in practice to use indirect pathways to pain relief. The herbs listed here appear to work by addressing the cause of the pain, rather than the experience of pain. These are anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic herbs that alleviate the processes underlying most muscle contractions and tension headaches. If a clear-cut underlying pathology exists, that should be the focus of treatment. If none has been identified, herbs that will ensure good elimination, support liver function, and address any specific health needs the patient might have should be selected."<sup>8</sup> Hoffmann makes an important point here in terms of how to treat headaches holistically, as opposed to just focusing on eliminating the pain. It is important to address the root cause in the first place, and if a certain cause or trigger is not known, to start broadly by helping to support the liver, the body's detoxification pathways, as well as calming and restoring the nervous system.

Now to get into some general herbs that are beneficial for migraine, as well as some simple remedies. Tension can be a contributing factor to headaches and

---

<sup>8</sup> Hoffmann, D. Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine. 2003. P. 365.

migraines, thus it is important to focus on nervine plants to not only calm, but also restore the nervous system. A formula that David Hoffmann recommends for tension related headaches is:

*Scutellaria lateriflora* (Skullcap) 2 parts  
*Valeriana officinalis* (Valerian Root) 2 parts  
*Avena sativa* (Milky Oats) 1 part

*This can be taken as a tincture and used three times per day, or can be made as an infusion, using 2 tsp of dried herbs per 8oz boiling water<sup>9</sup>.*

Another remedy that can be used to help alleviate pain once a migraine has set in is rubbing Lavender and Peppermint essential oils diluted in a carrier oil, rubbed in to temples or forehead.

Additionally, a cold compress can be used and Hoffmann provides the below recipe:

1 quart ice-cold water  
2 drops Peppermint essential oil  
1 drop Ginger essential oil  
1 drop Marjoram essential oil

*Place ice water in a bowl, add the drops of essential oil, soak a washcloth into the bowl and place on forehead<sup>10</sup>.*

Another single herb that Hoffmann mentions for the prevention of migraine is Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*). Hoffmann states, “Feverfew is a long-term treatment, not an immediate cure for a migraine attack. Clinical experience suggests that four to six weeks of treatment is usually required before a response will be seen. However, average duration of use will vary among migraine patients. Don’t use Feverfew for patients who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Some find that regular use of

---

<sup>9</sup> Hoffmann, D. Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine. 2003. P. 366.

<sup>10</sup> Hoffmann, D. Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine. 2003. P. 371.

feverfew is enough to control or even prevent migraines.”<sup>11</sup> As we see with most holistic treatments, this herb is not a single quick fix cure, rather it can work slowly overtime to help with prevention. There are even studies that have been done on the effectiveness and it is widely known as a bitter tonic. In regards to the specifics of how Feverfew works internally, “the herb appears to work at least in part by inhibiting the secretion of granular contents from blood platelets and neutrophils. The five main compounds identified as having this activity were parthenoide, 3-beta-hydroxy-parthenolide, secotanapartholide A, canin, and artecanin, all of which are sesquiterpene lactones. The researchers believe it is likely that these and other sesquiterpene lactones inhibit the release of prostaglandins and histamine during the inflammatory process, thus preventing the blood vessel spasms in the head that trigger migraine attacks.”<sup>12</sup> Feverfew can be a wonderful ally for migraine prevention, and this therapy works well while also focusing on what factors could be contributing to an inflammatory response in the body in the first place, so it is still incredibly important to look into other potential dietary and lifestyle triggers. The recommended dosage for prevention of migraines with Feverfew is 125mg of dried herb taken once daily.<sup>13</sup> While Feverfew is just one herb that has shown success in preventing migraines and bringing the body’s inflammatory systems back into balance, there are also a handful of other herbs that are good allies as well.

Most herbal remedies that are beneficial for headaches and migraines support the condition indirectly, for example by relaxing the nervous system, dilating the

---

<sup>11</sup> Hoffmann, D. Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine. 2003. P. 369.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffmann, D. Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine. 2003. P. 370.

<sup>13</sup> Hoffmann, D. Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine. 2003. P. 369.

vasculature, aiding the liver in detoxification, modulating inflammation, etc. With these herbal remedies, the goal is to assist the body in its natural function and bring the body into balance and further support its innate wisdom and ability to heal. These herbal remedies alone won't serve as a magic bullet, each migraineur is different and these herbal remedies will be far more effective when led by improvements and adjustments to lifestyle and diet as well.

Focusing first on the liver, we have **Milk Thistle** (*Silybum marianum*).

Strengthening the function of the liver will can help with body detoxify and can also reduce tension in the portal vein, which can oftentimes lead to headaches. Below we have a formula with Milk Thistle as the lead herb from herbalist Sajah Popham.

#### **Liver Relaxant Compound**

30% Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*)

20% Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)

20% Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*)

20% Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*)

10% Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)



According to Popham, “The concept of “liver relaxation” is a bit of a conundrum, as the liver is not directly innervated by the nervous system, so it can't exactly be tense itself, but the circulation to the liver can be constricted and tense, what might be called “liver wind” in Chinese medicine. This formula will help to relax the hepatic artery, which supplies the liver with fresh oxygenated blood to aid in its detoxification. When this

artery is relaxed of constriction, more blood gets in. It's an excellent headache formula, which is common of liver constriction.”<sup>14</sup>

The next herb to discuss is **Blue Vervain**. This herb primarily serves as both a nervine relaxant and a bitter tonic. Blue Vervain also supports the liver, while also easing tension, especially in the neck and shoulders, another common cause of headaches and migraines. Herbalist Sajah Popham notes, “Whenever someone has a tension headache with heat signs, rapid pounding pulse, and a stiff neck and shoulders, the first remedy I consider is Blue Vervain. It effectively relaxes the tension in the vasculature, the bitterness drains the vital force down and in, opens up the hepatic artery, moves stuck energy in the liver, and calms the nervous system.”<sup>15</sup> In an herbal formula, Blue Vervain pairs especially well with Wood Betony and Lavender.



Another herb that can be used to support the migraineur is **Lemon Balm** (*Melissa officinalis*). This herb is primarily used as a nervine, helping to soothe and calm the nervous system. In particular, Lemon Balm works on the three “seats” of the nervous system, the brain, the heart, and the digestive tract. “As it works in the head with focus, tranquility and clarity, it is also a super useful remedy for the treatment of vascular tension based headaches. When the blood vessels in the head get overly constricted, you get that throbbing pounding tension headache, where it feels like your

---

<sup>14</sup> Popham, S. *Materia Medica Monthly* Volume #27: Milk Thistle. P 18-19.

<sup>15</sup> Popham, S. *Materia Medica Monthly* Volume #5: Blue Vervain. P11.

head is in a vice. As we will see later, Lemon Balm helps to relax constriction in the blood vessels so the blood can flow more easily throughout the vasculature, which can help to relieve headache. That in combination with the nervine effect makes it ideal in this regard.”<sup>16</sup> Lemon Balm is wonderful to use as a daily tonic and is gentle enough to be calming and relaxing, but not sedating. Lemon Balm is also a gentle herb that can be used for children, and also brings a sense of ease and well-being.



While the first couple herbs mentioned had a focus on supporting the liver, these next few herbs have an affinity for restoring and nourishing the nervous system.

The next herb to discuss is **Milky Oats** (*Avena sativa*), an incredibly supporting and deeply restorative remedy. Below is a simple tonic formula from herbalist Sajah Popham that is useful for headaches, especially pain related to tension.

**Classic Nerve Tonic Pair**

Milky Oats (*Avena sativa*) 50%  
Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) 50%

Skullcap is a nervine sedative, but as with Lemon Balm, is gentle enough for daily use and being used throughout the day and will not cause drowsiness.<sup>17</sup> Milky Oats is known as “food for the nerves” and helps to repair, restore, and rebuild the



<sup>16</sup> Popham, S. *Materia Medica Monthly* Volume #11: Lemon Balm. P10.

<sup>17</sup> Popham, S. *Materia Medica Monthly* Volume #13: Milky Oats. P 13.

nervous system. Anyone who suffers from migraines knows how much stress is placed on the nerves in the skull during the onset of a migraine, and I find this remedy is not only useful for prevention, but also helps me recover after a migraine and rebuild my system after a long pain episode.

A classic herbal remedy for migraine and headaches that is often times overlooked is **Wood Betony** (*Stachys betonica*). This herb has been used for both the prevention of headaches and migraines, as well as during an attack. Herbalist Jim Macdonald states, "In regards to "how Betony works", there are likely myriad factors at play. Like most mint family plants, it possesses both stimulating and relaxant properties. This may seem contradictory, but only if we make the false assumption that



stimulation and relaxation exist at opposing ends of a spectrum. In truth, the stimulation is of the circulation of the body's vital energy, and the relaxation is of the *resistance* to that circulation. So we see that these principles are not at odds, but rather work towards the same end and enhance each other's ability to reach it. Betony clearly relaxes tension in the head: the tension of muscles, of blood vessels, of thoughts and of emotions. It

doesn't simply act physically, but seems to change the way we process energy in both the head and mind in a manner that resolves the conditions of tension and congestion that prevent the free and relaxed flow of the vital force.”<sup>18</sup> Jim Macdonald makes an

---

<sup>18</sup> Macdonald, J. Wood Betony: <https://www.herbcraft.org/betony.html>



important point here in how Wood Betony operates on both a physical and energetic level within the body, as well as discussing the interplay between tension and relaxation. I myself have experienced migraines that stem from physical reasons, emotional reasons, energetic reasons, and combinations of those things, which is oftentimes overlooked but it is critical in investigating the causes and patterns of how each individual expresses their migraine condition in a unique way.

Wood Betony can be used on its own or in combination with other herbs, as we see outlined below in a combination formula from herbalists Jim Macdonald and Sajah Popham, with Wood Betony as the lead herb.

#### Headache Formula

Wood Betony (*Stachys betonica*) 30%

Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*) 30%

Jamaican Dogwood (*Piscidia erythrina*) 15%

Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) 15%

Lavender (*Lavendula angustifolia*) 10%

Both Wood Betony and Blue Vervain help to release stuck energy in the liver, as well as ease tension in the neck and shoulders. Wood Betony, Black Cohosh, and Jamaican Dogwood relax not only the nerves and muscles, but also reduce tension in the blood vessels. Jamaican Dogwood is a specific for pain. Lastly, Lavender combines well with the Wood Betony and Blue Vervain to relax constriction in the liver.<sup>19</sup> As we can see from the above list of herbal remedies, it is crucial to look beyond just the pain, and beyond just the brain. The entire body is a delicate system that aims to remain in balance, and multiple body systems can be contributors to both the onset of migraine, as well as relief. As has been a theme throughout this entire report, we must look

---

<sup>19</sup> Popham, S. *Materia Medica Monthly Volume #8: Wood Betony*. P 20-21.

beyond the obvious factors and view the body and mind as a whole, complex unit, rather than looking at individual components. I feel strongly that migraine and headaches themselves are not the problem, rather, they are the body's response to an underlying condition or state that is out of balance and needs attention.

I also want to point out that the above herbs and formulas are not an exhaustive list of options, I'm simply summarizing a handful of key remedies and herbs as a foundation. I have used other herbs throughout my healing process as well, specifically a tincture and infusion of Meadowsweet, Wood Betony, and Elderflower, as well as using California Poppy and Willow Bark to relieve pain once a migraine has struck. The above list of herbs is meant to serve as a starting point to do further research and find what remedy works best for you. For myself, I prefer to have a few key remedies in my toolkit, some for prevention, other for pain relief during a migraine episode, and others to help my body recover.

In summary, this report has covered the basics of what a migraine is, what the process looks like, common treatments, lifestyle & dietary recommendations, herbal protocols, while weaving in a great deal of personal experience and the story of my own ongoing healing journey. These pages are meant to serve as a guide, an inspiration, a starting point, a unique perspective, in order to take inventory of where you currently are in your own personal healing journey, as well as empower you to be an active participant in your process. While this report is primarily about migraines, it is also encompassing of the overall process of tuning in to your own body and mind, shifting your perspective, and moving forward from a place of respect and acknowledgement as

to whatever ailment may be present in your life, migraine or otherwise. While being pain free and symptom-free is a high priority while navigating this path, what's even more important is focusing on where you're at in the process today, feeling empowered to take action and implement changes in your life, and viewing your migraine or other health condition as your teacher, as your healing journey continues to unfold.

## Bibliography

1. Low, R. Victory Over Migraine: The Breakthrough Study That Explains What Causes It and How It Can Be Completely Prevented. 1987.
2. Constantine, M, Scott, S, The American Council for Headache Education. Migraine The Complete Guide: A Comprehensive Resource Book for People with Migraine, Their Families, and Physicians. 1994.
3. Mundo, J. The Headache Healer's Handbook: A Holistic, Hands-On Somatic Self-Care Program for Headache and Migraine Relief and Prevention. 2018.
4. Hutchinson, S. The Woman's Guide to Managing Migraine: Understanding the Hormone Connection to Find Hope and Wellness. 2013.
5. Stanton, A. Fighting the Migraine Epidemic Complete Guide: How to Treat & Prevent Migraines Without Medications. 2017.
6. Hoffmann, D. Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine. 2003.
7. Macdonald, J. Wood Betony: <https://www.herbcraft.org/betony.html>
8. Mills, S., Bone, K. Principles and Practice of Phytotherapy: Modern Herbal Medicine. 2000.
9. Popham, S. Materia Medica Monthly Volume #27: Milk Thistle.
10. Popham, S. Materia Medica Monthly Volume #11: Lemon Balm.
11. Popham, S. Materia Medica Monthly Volume #5: Blue Vervain
12. Popham, S. Materia Medica Monthly Volume #13: Milky Oats.
13. Popham, S. Materia Medica Monthly Volume #8: Wood Betony.
14. Neese, A. How to Breathe: 25 Simple Practices for Calm, Joy, and Resilience. 2019.
15. LeCorre, E. The Practice of Natural Movement: Reclaim Power, Health, and Freedom. 2019.

