



Lyme + Headaches: Natural Relief for the 5 Most Common Causes

by Jenny Menzel, H.C.

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Take a look at just about every ailment in medical literature, and there's a good chance you'll see "headache" listed as a possible symptom, but not all headaches are a result of underlying illness. Most people who get occasional headaches will pop an over-the-counter pain reliever and carry on, but it's not always that simple for those battling [chronic Lyme disease](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



After graduating from medical school, Dr. Bill Rawls practiced conventional medicine for 15 years. However, when Lyme disease and fibromyalgia disrupted his career at age 45, he was forced into the world of herbal and alternative medicine. He has since restored his health—and has a passion to help others do the same. [Read his story »](#)



be taken for granted — like walking the dog, making breakfast for the kids, or going to work. These symptoms can be so severe that getting out of bed to shower might be the day's largest accomplishment, with modern headache medicine often unable to supply relief.

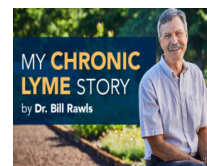


Approximately **80%** of children and **50%** of adults get Lyme-related headaches, with roughly **17%** experiencing at least moderate migraines. Many continue suffering through the pain for months to years with little reprieve. Plus, added to the emotional stress of managing chronic headache pain is the maze of trying to figure out what triggered it in the first place.

So why does Lyme disease cause headaches? And what can you do to find lasting relief? If you've been struggling for a while with Lyme and the headaches that often accompany this complex illness, consider whether the following might be contributing factors for you. Although some people might stumble upon a quick fix, that's probably not the norm for most, so you may have to be persistent in your healing efforts before noticing changes.

5 Lyme Headache Causes and Solutions

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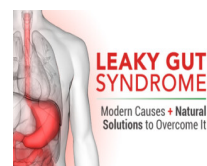


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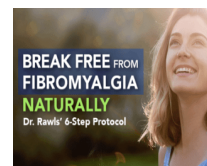
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A common misperception about microbes is that they're generally bad and should be killed. However, **our bodies house trillions of helpful microorganisms**, which

outnumber our own cells by about 10 to 1 and account for up to 3% of our body weight. They're essential to maintaining homeostasis and balancing our body's [microbiome](#).

But this balance can be upset when [Borrelia burgdorferi](#), the bacteria that causes Lyme, and [coinfections](#), including [bartonella](#), [babesia](#), and [mycoplasma](#), among others, proliferate throughout the body. The result? **They may entrench themselves into places like the brain, kicking up a storm of headache-causing neuroinflammation** as the body tries its best to corral the stealth pathogens.



Solution: Suppress Microbes with Antimicrobial Herbs

To make some progress, you may need to focus on long-term ways to suppress harmful microbes. [Herbal antimicrobials](#) may not be as potent outright as traditional [antibiotics](#), but they can combat bacteria over an extended period of time without disrupting the microbiome or the toxicity that can come with aggressive drug therapies. **Herbs also boost immunity and tame inflammation** — typically not something antibiotics have a flair for. Top herbal choices include:

- **Andrographis:** [Andrographis](#) has a longstanding history of medicinal use in India, and it contains antibacterial, antiviral, and antiparasitic properties. It also has immune-enhancing, cardioprotective, and liver-protective qualities.
- **Cat's claw:** Native to the Amazon region, [cat's claw](#) contains antimicrobial properties and is a foundational herb in most Lyme disease protocols.

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- **Japanese knotweed:** [Japanese knotweed](#) with resveratrol has been used for centuries in traditional Asian medicine, and it's a potent antioxidant with antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties. The herb may also assist in combating bartonella.
- **Chinese skullcap:** As a multi-purpose herb, [Chinese skullcap](#) has antimicrobial properties, decreases cytokines, and supports immunity. It works well with other herbal remedies to enhance their effectiveness.
- **Sarsaparilla:** The root of [sarsaparilla](#) has been used throughout the tropics for inflammatory conditions of the skin, connective tissues, and the bowel. It binds to and helps dispose of endotoxins that are released from microbes during die-off.



Exciting [research](#) published in *Frontiers* adds credence to the use of plant extracts to combat persistent infections. Japanese knotweed, in particular, offered superior protection against a wide range of microbes by busting [biofilms](#) and crossing the blood-brain barrier, where Lyme can impact different regions in the brain and potentially produce headaches. **Other herbs that showed antimicrobial properties were black walnut, sweet wormwood, Mediterranean rockrose, and [cryptolepis](#),**

If you're new to herbal therapy, working with a well-trained, Lyme-literate practitioner or doctor can help you find the right blend of antimicrobial herbs to reduce the frequency and intensity of your Lyme headaches.



Cause 2: Herxheimer Reactions

[Herxheimer reactions](#) (usually referred to as a herx or herxing) can occur within days of starting or increasing dosages in your Lyme protocol. And while plant-based antimicrobials are gentler on the body than antibiotics, they still effectively kill bacteria, which means **they're not exempt from causing herx reactions, including headaches, due to pathogenic die-off.**

When these microscopic bugs are attacked and killed, pieces of dead bacteria called endotoxins can create an inflammatory autoimmune-like response. **If you find your headaches increase after introducing any form of antimicrobial agents to your system, it may be a sign that you're not expelling endotoxins fast enough.**



Solution: Detoxify Your Body

Getting your organs of elimination ([colon](#), skin, liver, kidneys, lymph, and lungs) **opened up and operating optimally is at the core of minimizing herx reactions**, and there are many ways to [detox](#) and expel inflammatory endotoxins to improve head pain:

Clean Your Pipes

Constipation is a sign of hampered digestion, keeping toxins stuck in your body and recirculating when they need to get out. **Eating a [whole-food diet](#) full of fibrous fruits and veggies supports a healthy gut microbiome and increases your ability to export toxins.** If diet alone isn't doing the trick, natural remedies like castor oil packs

Sweat It Out

Sweating through your body's largest elimination organ, the skin, is imperative to ejecting toxins.

[Exercise](#) is a great way to induce sweat but not necessarily when you're in the throes of a Lyme headache or migraine. If you're feeling too depleted for exercise, [far-infrared](#) (FIR) saunas, red light therapy, or heating pads can raise your body temperature and spark a toxin-removing sweat session while honoring your need for rest.

Support Your Liver

[Your liver](#) works hard to filter toxic waste from the blood and breakdown harmful substances in the body — support it with [N-acetyl cysteine \(NAC\)](#), a valuable antioxidant and [glutathione](#) precursor which helps reduce inflammatory [cytokines](#), protect nerve tissues, and combat the toxins that may trigger migraines. One [study](#) found that **NAC helps reduce the frequency of monthly headaches when combined with vitamins C and E as a preventative measure.**

Manage Your Lymph Fluid

Much like the circulatory system carries nutrient-rich blood into our cells for nourishment, the [lymphatic system](#) has a similar network of vessels that carries waste away from those same cells, helping us stay healthy by fighting infection. However, there's one major difference: Our hearts automatically pump blood, whereas our **lymphatic system has no such pump and requires the action of your muscles and respiratory system to keep it moving.** Manage your lymph fluid by exercising, dry brushing your skin, and adequately hydrating to help your body remove toxic waste.

Be Mindful of Your Breath

Deep breathing has [displayed](#) a number of detoxifying

the perception of pain by modulating the sympathetic nervous system through relaxation. A breathing technique that can help your body's ability to rest and digest is the down-regulated breath, which involves slowing your breathing down to four breaths (or less) per minute.

How to practice down-regulated breathing: In a seated or resting position, slowly inhale through your nose for a count of eight, raising your belly and then your lungs. Hold for a bit at the top of the breath. Then, exhale through your nose while deflating your belly and lungs for a count of eight.

Practice this for a few rounds until you feel yourself relaxing. Because of the strong parasympathetic response, this breath is best done after a meal, before bed, or any time you feel anxious (never while driving). It may take time to reach a full eight counts on each inhale and exhale, but with practice, you'll find your rhythm.



Cause 3: Food Sensitivities

True food allergies and intolerances are hard to miss and can even be life-threatening in some cases. But for many with Lyme, **subtle [food sensitivities](#) form slowly and go undetected as a result of [leaky gut syndrome](#)** — an inflammatory condition caused by intestinal permeability, usually due to long-lived gut imbalances from infections, prolonged antibiotic use, poor diet, and stress. Indeed, many people can pinpoint specific foods that bring on headaches and migraines, but what can be done about it?



Solution: Work on Gut Health

While nixing the offending foods should be at the top of the to-do list to minimize headaches, **[healing your gut](#)** is also a priority so that you

lining, while digestive enzymes aid in breaking down the food you eat. The abundant amino acid [L-glutamine](#) shows ample ability to increase the tight junction proteins needed for a strong intestinal wall. Additionally, **bitter herbs like dandelion and burdock will also take a load off the liver to assist digestion.**



Cause 4: Medications

Headaches are a side effect of some antibiotics. Those with chronic Lyme disease have often tried a range of antibiotic interventions, making it difficult to tell if the headaches stem from medication use or the illness itself. What's more, in an effort to cope with head pain or migraines, the overuse of certain pain-relieving medications often end up doing the opposite of their intended design: **Instead of alleviating headaches, they wind up causing them.**



Solution: Seek Natural Pain Relief

Magnesium

[Research](#) suggests that different forms of **magnesium, the crucial mineral responsible for over 300 biochemical reactions in the body, has promising potential for migraine relief**, with intravenous (IV) magnesium sulphate offering the most impressive results. But if IV magnesium isn't realistic every time you have a Lyme-related headache, supplementing it may be beneficial for you. However, not all magnesium is created equal. For example, inexpensive magnesium oxide isn't readily absorbed by the body and may cause loose stools and stomach upset. Instead, **opt for such bioavailable forms as magnesium glycinate or liposomal magnesium, the form of the mineral most able to cross the blood-brain barrier.**

Biofeedback is a non-invasive way to gain greater awareness and control over certain body functions, and it's proven itself as a useful tool to reduce migraines as well. As a matter of fact, a [study](#) published in *Behavioral and Brain Functions* found migraine frequency and symptom severity were cut in half for up to 70% in the study participants.

The average sustained results lasted around 14.5 months after therapies were discontinued — and one of three biofeedback therapies used in the trial, [hemoencephalography \(HEG\)](#), was considered to be a superior migraine management tool compared to other biofeedback options. Plus, when administered by a trained professional (like a healthcare provider), **most insurance carriers often cover biofeedback sessions.**

Curcumin

This primary anti-inflammatory compound found in the spice [turmeric](#) has been attributed to providing potent pain relief, according to one [study](#) in the *International Journal of Preventive Medicine*. **Curcumin has proven its power to reduce the severity, frequency, and duration of headache and migraine symptoms by targeting the same NF-kB and COX pathways as aspirin and ibuprofen**, thereby regulating pain and inflammation known to cause migraine headaches.



Cause 5: Chronic Stress

It's a safe bet that if we were to dig to the root of all illness, some form of physical, mental, or emotional [stress](#) could be found. In fact, according to a [study](#) published in *The Journal of Headache and Pain*, **perceived stress is the most common trigger of chronic migraines.** There are proven ways to modulate our body's stress response, but finding the methods that work best for you is what matters most



Solution: Calm Your Nervous System

Learning to self-soothe in stressful situations can go a long way toward

curbing headaches. However, if you feel like you've tried everything to get rid of them, **get back to the basics with a stress-reducing, mind-body practice**, where you can be in control. But don't let this be one more thing on your to-do list that stresses you out, too. Keep it simple by choosing one practice you feel curious about, start slow, and be consistent. Some mind-body options to consider include:

- [Yoga](#)
- [Qigong](#)
- Meditation
- [Vagal nerve toning](#)
- Acupuncture and acupressure
- Essential oils
- Positive affirmations

Managing these five causes can go a long way toward warding off future headaches and migraines caused by Lyme (and life). And while it may seem overwhelming to keep up with it all, investing time and effort into just a few of these solutions will eventually pay off. Keep at it, even if relief isn't felt overnight. It can and often does get better.

Dr. Rawls is a physician who overcame Lyme disease through natural herbal therapy. You can learn more about Lyme disease in Dr. Rawls' new best selling book, [Unlocking Lyme](#).

You can also learn about Dr. Rawls' personal

fibromyalgia in his popular blog post, [My Chronic Lyme Journey](#).

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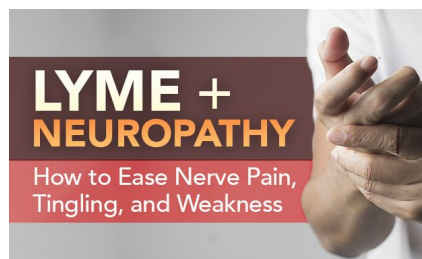
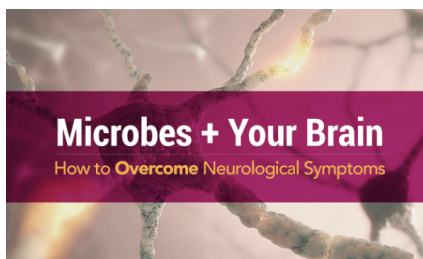
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