

FAST: A Tool for Managing Chronic Headaches

Headache disorders can be painful and disabling. Repeated headache attacks can cause substantial personal suffering and impair quality of life, with a constant fear of having “the next one”. There is increasing evidence that food sensitivities are directly linked to many of those with chronic headaches, and testing for food allergies and sensitivities and finding which foods the patient is potentially “allergic” to can make a huge impact in their quality of life.



Headache’s Connection to Food Sensitivities – The Facts

- Approximately 15-20% of adults have a food intolerance or sensitivity.¹
- These patients report a wide range of symptoms, including chronic headaches like migraines.²
- Headache disorders are among the most common disorders of the nervous system, with migraine headaches affecting up to 15% of the American population.³
- Headaches are reported to be directly linked to IgG food sensitivities.⁴
- Food allergies, sensitivities/intolerances linked to GUT microbiome disruption and mucosal damage.
- Migraine headaches linked to GUT microbiome disruption.⁵
- Testing for food allergies/sensitivities (FAST) and initiating an appropriate elimination diet can significantly improve patient’s headache symptoms and frequency.

Headache’s Connection to Food Sensitivities – The Studies

- **IgG food sensitivities** have been **linked to migraines** for over a decade.⁶
- There are studies that report foods such as chocolate, cheese, cow’s milk, eggs, and red wine are triggers for migraine headaches.⁷
- In one 2007 study, researchers reported that individuals who regularly experienced migraines were **more likely to test positive for IgG reactivity to common foods**.⁸ In addition, people with migraines had IgG reactivity to a much greater number of foods compared to the control group. Notably, **more than 75% of people in the migraine group no longer experienced regular migraines after doing a food elimination diet guided by the IgG test results**.
- In another study from 2010, it was reported that a 6-week IgG-based elimination diet was effective at reducing the number of headache days and migraine attacks in a group of migraine patients.⁹ Also, **a significant reduction of acute medication was observed**.
- Recent evidence suggests the **GUT microbiome connection** to headaches. It is reported the gut microbiota plays a critical role in many types of chronic pain, including migraine headaches.¹⁰
- Current literature supports the fact that food allergies, intolerances and sensitivities are **directly tied to metainflammatory sequelae** and the release of GUT mucosal IgE and IgG type antibodies.^{11,12,13}
- Research points to those suffering from migraines that have a long headache history and high headache frequency have a higher chance of being diagnosed with IBS.¹⁴

Managing Chronic Headache Patients

1. **Test for food allergies/sensitivities (FAST)** – IgG, complement
 - a. Due to GUT microbiome changes, this needs to be performed at least annually
2. **Elimination Diet** - foods commonly causing migraine headaches include:¹⁵
 - a. Caffeine
 - b. Artificial sweeteners, dyes, chemical additives including MSG
 - c. Alcohol
 - d. Chocolate
 - e. Cured meats
 - f. Aged cheeses
 - g. Pickled and fermented foods
3. **GUT microbiome and mucosal support**
4. **Decrease stress** and HPA axis disruption

¹ Lomer MC. Review article: the aetiology, diagnosis, mechanisms and clinical evidence for food intolerance. *Aliment Pharmacol Ther.* 2015;41(3):262-275.

² Neuendorf Rachael, et al. Impact of Food Immunoglobulin G-Based Elimination Diet on Subsequent Food Immunoglobulin G and Quality of Life in Overweight/Obese Adults. *J Altern Compl Med.* 2019;25(2): <https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2018.0310>.

³ United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC). www.cdc.gov. Accessed May 2021.

⁴ Monroe J, et al. Migraine is a food-allergic disease. *Lancet.* 1984;2(8405):719-21.

⁵ Arzani M, et al. Gut-brain axis and migraine headache: a comprehensive review. *J Headache Pain.* 2020;21(1):15.

⁶ Alpay K, et al. Diet restriction in migraine, based on IgG against foods: A clinical double-blind, randomized, cross-over trial. *Cephalalgia.* 2010;30:829–37.

⁷ Geiselman JF. The clinical use of IgG food sensitivity testing with migraine headache patients: a literature review. *Curr Pain Headache Reports.* 2019;23(11):79.

⁸ Hernandez CM, et al. Food allergy mediated by IgG antibodies associated with migraines in adults. *Rev Alerg Mex.* 2007;54(5):162-8.

⁹ Alpay K, et al. Diet restriction in migraine, based on IgG against foods: A clinical double-blind, randomized, cross-over trial. *Cephalalgia.* 2010;30:829–37.

¹⁰ Arzani M, et al. Gut-brain axis and migraine headache: a comprehensive review. *J Headache Pain.* 2020;21(1):15.

¹¹ Ohtsuka Y. Food intolerance and mucosal inflammation. *Pediatr Int.* 2015;57(1):22-9.

¹² Chahine BG, et al. The role of the GUT mucosal immunity in the development of tolerance versus development of allergy to food. *Curr Opin Allergy Clin Immunol.* 2010;10(4):394-9.

¹³ Berlin MC. Mucosal antibodies in the regulation of tolerance and allergy to foods. *Semin Immunopathol.* 2012;34(5):633-42.

¹⁴ Arzani M, et al. Gut-brain axis and migraine headache: a comprehensive review. *J Headache Pain.* 2020;21(1):15.

¹⁵ Geiselman JF. The clinical use of IgG food sensitivity testing with migraine headache patients: a literature review. *Curr Pain Headache Reports.* 2019;23(11):79.