



Heading Off IG-Induced Headaches

By Trudie Mitschang

PATIENTS WHO INFUSE immune globulin (IG) may experience side effects. One of the most common is the post-infusion headache. For some, symptoms can last for hours or even days, and while any type of headache can hinder daily activities, migraine-level pain can be especially debilitating. Often, infusion providers may ask patients to rate their level of pain to best determine a treatment plan. “The first thing we want to assess is the severity of the headache. We ask patients to rate their pain on a scale from one to 10,” says Michelle Greer, RN, IGCN, senior vice president of sales at NuFACTOR Specialty Pharmacy. “If patients have a history of migraines, they can usually tell us if they are experiencing a headache or an actual migraine.”

Pretreatment Options to Avoid Post-Infusion Pain

The patient’s regimen in the days leading up to an infusion can significantly affect how a person’s body responds during and after treatment. For example, dehydration is often at the root of many IG side effects. Experts recommend IG patients start drinking water, juice and power drinks the day before an infusion, and advise avoiding coffee and alcohol, both of which can lead to dehydration. Some patients have also seen good results from sipping electrolyte rehydration drinks, which are good to have on hand before, during and after infusions because they provide the body with necessary minerals and salts to function properly.

When it comes to premedication, taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) prior to the infusion is another way to ward off an IG headache. For patients with a history of migraines, premedication with their migraine-specific prescription can also be beneficial. For those with a medical history of severe headaches specifically triggered by IG, some physicians will also prescribe a steroid as pre- and even postmedication. In addition, lowering the rate of infusion and giving acetaminophen and antihistamines before the infusion decreases the risk of most mild side effects, including headache. In rare cases, a particularly acute form of headache resulting from aseptic meningitis can occur following IG therapy. Typically characterized by a very severe headache, fever, stiff neck and/or aversion to light (photophobia), these symptoms signal immediate medical attention should be sought.

Treating Headaches Once They Happen

For IG patients, preventing a headache is always optimal, but if a headache has already started, finding relief fast is a top priority. Here are some traditional over-the-counter recommendations:

- *Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).* These include medicines like aspirin, ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) and naproxen. This type of medicine should not be taken by anyone with a history of stomach bleeding. And, a doctor or pharmacist should be consulted about possible interactions when combined with other medications.

- *Acetaminophen (Tylenol).* Acetaminophen may be safely taken with NSAIDs for an additive effect. Taking acetaminophen by itself is usually safe, even with a history of stomach ulcers or bleeding. It should not be taken by those who have liver disorders or three or more alcoholic drinks a day.

- *Combination medications.* Some over-the-counter pain relievers have been approved for use with migraine. These include Excedrin Migraine that contains acetaminophen and aspirin combined with caffeine. A similar effect can be achieved by taking two aspirin or acetaminophen tablets with a cup of black coffee.

- *Migraine wraps.* These flexible bands feature a removable gel pack (hot or cold) to offer therapeutic relief from headache pain.

- *Aromatherapy.* In this therapy, essential oils are breathed or rubbed on skin to help patients relax and change how they perceive pain. Lavender, ginger or peppermint oils are recommended to relieve headache pain.

- *Magnesium.* People who suffer from serious headaches such as migraines often have low levels of magnesium, and several studies suggest magnesium may prevent the wave of brain signaling, called cortical spreading depression, that produces the visual and sensory changes common when experiencing a severe headache. Taking 200 mg to 600 mg of magnesium a day can reduce the frequency of headaches. Dietary sources of magnesium include beans, whole grains, seeds, nuts and vegetables like broccoli.

Treatment Is Available

Patients who depend on IG therapy to manage chronic illness recognize side effects are something they can learn to manage. While IG-induced headaches are very common, the good news is there are also many ways to either treat them or avoid them altogether. ■

TRUDIE MITSCHANG is a contributing writer for *IG Living* magazine.



Now Essential Oils Pure Peppermint Oil

Peppermint oil is a therapeutic natural option for headache relief. Peppermint is known to be calming and numbing, making it helpful for people who suffer from migraine-level headaches. To use, the oil is applied to the forehead and temples. \$7.99;

gnc.com

Nature's Truth Aromatherapy Lavender Essential Oil

New evidence shows lavender oil can effectively treat severe headaches. One recent study in *European Neurology* concluded that inhaling lavender essential oil may be an effective and safe way to relieve migraine pain. It is used by adding two to four drops of oil to two to three cups of boiling water and inhaling the vapors. A few drops can also be massaged into the skin. \$6.99;

bedbathandbeyond.com



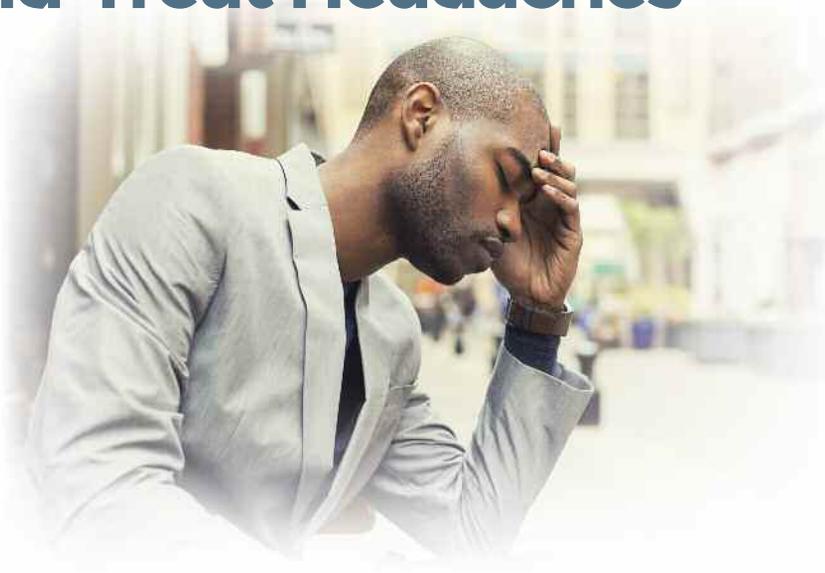
Shopping Guide to Prevent and Treat Headaches



Gel-Filled Migraine Wrap

This spa-inspired migraine wrap can be securely wrapped around the head or neck. It is used by warming in the microwave or cooling in the freezer, depending on desired treatment.

\$4.98; walmart.com



Nature's Bounty Magnesium

This high-potency nutritional supplement contains 125 percent of the daily recommended value for magnesium. Recommended serving is one tablet per day. \$11.99 (2-pack); amazon.com



Excedrin Migraine

This neurologist-recommended over-the-counter treatment has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for migraine relief. The formula contains a blend of acetaminophen, aspirin and therapeutically active caffeine. \$9.99;

target.com