

# EarthTalk™

## From the Editors of E/The Environmental Magazine

**Dear EarthTalk:** Are there natural headache remedies that can get me off of Tylenol, Advil and other medicines whose side effects can be as bad as or worse than the pain that led me to use them?

-- Jan Levinson, Portland, ME

Many of us may be too dependent on over-the-counter painkillers to treat the occasional headache, especially given the side effects of such drugs. Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) can increase the risk of heart and circulation problems—including heart attack and stroke—and is also tough on the digestive tract.

Too much acetaminophen (Tylenol) has been linked to nausea, diarrhea, and kidney and liver problems. Many natural health care practitioners disparage drugs for merely masking the symptoms of larger problems.

All headaches are not the same and gobbling down pain pills will not address the causes, whatever they may be. Some headaches are caused by tension; others stem from sinus congestion, caffeine withdrawal, constipation, food allergies, spinal misalignment or lack of sleep.

And then there are migraines, which researchers think are neurological in nature: The brain fails to constrict the nerve pathways that open the arteries to the brain, resulting in a pounding headache as blood flows in unchecked. Assessing what kind of headache you may have can help lead the way to a solution beyond deadening the pain with a pill.

To make tension headaches go away, the *Farmers' Almanac* recommends applying an ice pack to the neck and upper back, or, even better, getting someone to

massage those areas. Also, soaking the feet in hot water can divert blood from your head to your feet, easing any kind of headache pain in the process.

Another all-natural headache cure is acupressure (like acupuncture, but without the needles), which promotes healing throughout the body by stimulating channels of energy known as meridians. Victoria Abreo, alternative medicine editor for the website BellaOnline, says that anyone suffering from a tension headache can employ a simple acupressure technique to help relieve the pain:

"With one hand, press the shallow indentation in the back of the head at the base of the skull," explains Abreo. "Simultaneously, with the thumb and forefinger of the other hand, press firmly into the upper hollows of the eye sockets, right where they straddle the bridge of the nose and meet the 't' of the eyebrow bridge." She says to press softly at first, and then more firmly, holding for three to five minutes.

As for migraines, avoiding certain trigger foods might be key to staving them off. Abreo says migraine sufferers should try steering clear of dairy products, processed meat, red wine, caffeine and chocolate. New research has shown that some people with specific dietary deficiencies are more prone to migraines.

According to Dr. Linda White, who writes about natural health for *Mother Earth News*, some recent clinical trials have shown three nutritional supplements—magnesium, riboflavin and coenzyme Q10—to be particularly effective at reducing the frequency and severity of migraines.

Also, a number of herbs—including



Massage and techniques such as acupressure (acupuncture without the needles) can go a long way to relieve tension headaches without the need for chemical painkillers. (Getty Images)

feverfew, butterbur, lavender, ginkgo biloba, rosemary and chamomile—have proven track records in preventing or stopping migraines. Since herbs can be potent and are not regulated or tested, headache sufferers should consult a trusted doctor or naturopath before using alternative remedies.

**CONTACTS:** Farmers' Almanac, [www.farmersalmanac.com](http://www.farmersalmanac.com); BellaOnline, [www.bellaonline.com](http://www.bellaonline.com); Mother Earth News, [www.motherearthnews.com](http://www.motherearthnews.com).

**Dear EarthTalk:** Are there any electric bicycles or scooters that make for a nice cheap, green-friendly commute?

-- Sean Foley, Nashua, NH

Bicycle commuting has long been a symbol of greener living, and it is great exercise, too. But most people are probably not up to commutes much beyond five or 10 miles one-way in the interest of time and in not arriving at work too

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