Headache & Allergies, NHF

The relationship between allergies and headaches is controversial. Many patients with migraine headache link their reactions to certain foods as being an allergic condition. In most cases, this is not correct. The majority of foods that play a role in migraine contain vasoactive or neuroactive amino acids. These include:

- Tyramine.
- Phenylethylamine.
- Dopamine.
- Monosodium glutamate.

These amino acids are not the building blocks of proteins. But they are produced from amino acids which are.

The human immune system is the system in our body which fights disease. It is also the system which allows allergies to proteins, but not amino acids (the building blocks of proteins). This means that a person may be allergic to a protein such as that found in eggs. But he/she is not allergic to the amino acids which make up that protein. The same may be true for people who notice that certain smells provoke their migraine attacks. The sensory system of some patients with migraine will cause them to have attacks provoked by certain specific smells or lighting situations. When a true allergy exists to a compound in the air, the nasal or respiratory tissues react because of the white blood cells involved in allergy. This causes chemicals to be released. These lead to effects we typically relate with hay fever:

- Nasal congestion.
- Drainage.
- Sneezing.

There have been studies of migraine patients to evaluate for abnormalities of that portion of the immune system and white blood cells responsible for infection. But they have not found evidence of a relationship between allergy and migraine. There are many individuals who have respiratory allergies which contribute to or cause headaches arising from their nasal passages or sinuses. Examination and diagnostic tests can isolate and specifically help to resolve these problems for most patients.

At times migraine and other headache patients may get headaches related to allergic problems like these. They may even provoke an increase in their normal headaches or migraines. This is because the allergic headaches lead to:

- Reflex contraction of scalp and facial muscles.
- Increased pain.
- Other physiological changes.

The scientific foundation and the results of clinical treatment of allergies which are thought to trigger migraines have not been able to be verified by the majority of physicians.

Information courtesy of the National Headache Foundation

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