

Do people with migraine get enough exercise?

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More than two-thirds of people with migraine do not get enough exercise, according to a preliminary study released today, February 23, 2021, that will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 73rd Annual Meeting being held virtually April 17 to 22, 2021. The study found that people who do get a minimum of two-and-a-half hours

of moderate to vigorous exercise a week had a reduced rate of migraine triggers like stress, depression and sleep problems.

"Migraine is a disabling condition that affects millions of people in the United States, and yet [regular exercise](#) may be an effective way to reduce the frequency and intensity of some migraines," said study author Mason Dyess, D.O., of the University of Washington in Seattle and a member of the American Academy of Neurology. "Exercise releases natural pain killers called endorphins, helps people sleep better and reduces stress. But if people with migraine are not exercising, they may not be reaping these benefits."

The study involved 4,647 people diagnosed with migraine. Approximately three-fourths of participants had chronic migraine, meaning 15 or more migraines a month. The others had episodic migraine, or up to 14 a month.

Participants completed a questionnaire about their migraine characteristics, sleep, depression, stress, anxiety and the amount of moderate to vigorous [exercise](#) they got each week. Types of exercise that qualified as moderate to vigorous included jogging, very brisk walking, playing a sport, heavy cleaning and bicycling.

Two-and-a-half hours a week of moderate to vigorous exercise, or 150 minutes, is the minimum amount of exercise recommended by the World Health Organization.

Researchers divided participants into five groups based on level of moderate to vigorous weekly exercise: people who exercised zero minutes per week; people who exercised 1 to 30 minutes; people who exercised 31 to 90 minutes; people who exercised 91 to 150 minutes; and people who exercised more than 150 minutes per week.

Researchers found that 1,270 people, or just 27% of the people in the study, reported getting the highest amount of exercise.

Researchers found that people who got less than two-and-a-half hours of moderate to [vigorous exercise](#) per week had increased rates of depression, anxiety and sleep problems.

Depression was reported by 47% of people in the group that did not exercise, or 377 of 806 people, compared to 25% of people in the group that exercised the most, or 318 of 1,270 people.

In addition, anxiety was reported by 39% of people in the no exercise group compared to 28% of the people in the high exercise group. Sleep problems were reported by 77% of people in the no exercise group compared to 61% in the high exercise group.

Researchers also found an association between exercise and the risk of migraines. Of people in the no exercise group, 5% had low [headache](#) frequency defined as zero to four headache days per month, and 48% had high headache frequency defined as having 25 or more headache days per month. Of the people in the high exercise group, 10% had low headache frequency and 28% had high headache frequency.

"There are new therapeutics available for migraine, but they are very expensive. People with migraine should consider incorporating more exercise into their [daily life](#) because it may be a safe and low-cost way to manage and minimize some of the other problems that often accompany migraine," said Dyess.

A limitation of the study was that participants reported weekly exercise minutes rather than having their activity monitored with a device. This research only shows associations between exercise and [migraine](#) triggers. It does not prove cause and effect.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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