

Some good news for those with migraines

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A new study from researchers at the University of Toronto found that 63% of Canadians with migraine headaches are able to flourish, despite the painful condition.

"This research provides a very hopeful message for individuals struggling with migraines, their families and [health professionals](#)," says lead author Esme Fuller-Thomson, who spent the last decade publishing on negative mental health outcomes associated with migraines, including suicide attempts, [anxiety disorders](#) and depression. "The findings of our study have contributed to a major paradigm shift for me. There are important lessons to be learned from those who are flourishing."

A migraine headache, which afflicts one in eight Americans, is the seventh most disabling disorder in the world. However, few studies have investigated the factors that are associated with mental health and well-being among those who experience them.

The University of Toronto study investigated optimal mental health in a large, representative sample of more than 2,000 Canadians with

migraines. To be defined in excellent mental health, respondents had to achieve three things: 1) almost daily happiness or [life satisfaction](#) in the past month, 2) high levels of social and psychological well-being in the past month, and 3) freedom from generalized anxiety disorder and depressive disorders, suicidal thoughts and substance dependence for at least the preceding full year.

"We were so encouraged to learn that more than three in every five migraineurs were in excellent mental health and had very high levels of well-being," says Fuller-Thomson, a Professor at both the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and the Department of Family & Community Medicine at U of T and who the director of U of T's Institute for Life Course and Aging.

Those experiencing migranes who had at least one person in their lives in whom they could confide were four times more likely to be in excellent mental health than those without a confidant. In addition, those who turned to their religious or [spiritual beliefs](#) to cope with everyday difficulties had 86% higher odds of excellent mental health than those who did not use spiritual coping. The researchers also found that poor physical health, functional limitations, and a history of depression were impediments to excellent [mental health](#) among those with migraines.

"Health professionals who are treating individuals with migraines need to consider their patients' physical health needs and possible social isolation in their treatment plans" says co-author Marta Sadkowski, a recent nursing graduate from the University of Toronto.

The researchers examined a nationally representative sample of 2,186 Canadian community-dwelling adults who reported that they had been diagnoses with migraines by a [health](#) professional. The data were drawn from Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey-Mental Health. This research was published online ahead of press this month in the Annals of

Headache Medicine.

More information: Esme Fuller-Thomson, Flourishing Despite Migraines: A Nationally Representative Portrait of Resilience and Mental Health among Canadians, *Annals Of Headache Medicine Journal* (2021). [DOI: 10.30756/ahmj.2021.05.02](https://doi.org/10.30756/ahmj.2021.05.02)

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