

# **Migraines and Macrobiotics: The Cure that Lasts a Lifetime**

By  
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Here's a shocking fact: According to the National Headache Foundation, an estimated 29.5 million people in the United States suffer from migraines each year. That's 29.5 million people who experience pain that may be on one side of the head, throbbing or pounding, or aggravated by activity, along with nausea or sensitivity to light or sound. What these millions of people may not know is that the cause of migraines is excess production of serotonin that constricts the blood vessels in the brain, reducing energy flow. When energy levels decrease in the brain, migraines occur. Fortunately, that also means that when energy levels in the brain *increase*, migraines will go away.

Have you had migraines? What do they feel like for you? Before embracing the macrobiotic lifestyle, I suffered from excruciating migraines, consisting of knife-sharp pain on the side of the head, accompanied by dizziness and nausea. The symptoms were so severe I wasn't able to function and needed to sleep all day to escape from the pain. I resisted trying prescription medication because I wanted to find natural ways of preventing the migraines rather than just masking the pain. At the time, I felt discouraged, but one day I found the answer to my problems. I discovered macrobiotics, a remedy that healed my migraines on a physical level and led to a more balanced way of living.

## **Macrobiotics Made Simple**

In the Asian concept of the human body, there are the digestive system, circulatory system, respiratory system, endocrine system, etc. But there is also the energy system, the life force or chi, which allows the organs to communicate with each other so they can nourish or control the activity of other organs. This energy can become blocked through congestion, causing problems in other systems, as the systems are connected through the meridians (energy channels).

If we look at the word macrobiotics, we see that "macro" means large and "bio" means life. Macrobiotics is an ancient practice of living in harmony with the order of the

universe. The macrobiotic approach to migraines is to view the person as a whole, determine which organs have excess or deficient energy, and heal the person holistically with whole foods. We've gotten away from our basic nature and look toward medicine and high technology to fix our health problems. While the medical approach is to treat symptoms, the macrobiotic approach is to find and heal the cause behind the symptoms. Even more than that, change begins at the deepest level of a person's body, since we are made of the food we eat.

Modern nutrition looks only at the partial effects of food, the material components that provide information. However, macrobiotic nutrition examines the energetic, comprehensive effect of food from the point of view of balance – how everything fits together to affect you as a whole. Problems occur when we are not eating according to our body's needs and design. When this happens, our body sends us messages in the form of pain, such as migraines, to tell us where there is blockage (stagnation). This is a sign that we are out of balance with nature and that we seek to find our balance again to stop the pain.

Processed and refined foods and supplements, although derived from whole foods, do not retain the same energetics as eating whole foods. Whole foods contain all the essential nutrients, in balanced proportions, that harmonize with the body's needs. In other words, our bodies have appetites that outweigh what our stomachs urge us to eat. The first step to health is to give in to our body's cravings. Furthermore, eating seasonal, locally grown food allows the body to become more centered energetically by adapting to the climate and environment. Eating extreme foods that are inappropriate for the climate and region often leads to weakness in the organs, so that the body becomes more susceptible to disease.

## **Surprising Origins of Migraines**

Let's begin by looking at the main organs involved with migraines: the liver and large intestine. The liver functions to ensure the free and easy movement of etheric energy (or chi) in the body and stores and controls the blood. It is important to women's health to regulate the menstrual blood flow. The large intestine functions to extract water and minerals from the wastes and remove them from the body.

The first function of the liver, to regulate the movement of chi in the body, can best be seen during the season when the liver is the most active. In the spring, when energy is rising, excess liver energy can rise too quickly. This may cause headaches or migraines at the top of the head where the liver energy pathway (or meridian) flows. There may

also be symptoms such as dizziness and hypertension, along with mood swings and excessive emotional reactions. As an example, an imbalance in the liver may result in emotions of anger or impatience being released. Conversely, unexpressed or excessive emotions, such as depression or long-term frustration, can create an imbalance in the liver. Therefore, a peaceful lifestyle and balanced emotional states are important elements for healthy liver function.

The second function of the liver is to store blood at rest and send blood into the circulatory system during activity. A healthy liver is responsible for providing nourishment to other organs and regular, pain-free menstrual cycles. However, when the liver is malfunctioning, a woman may experience irregular periods, PMS, cramps, breast pain, headaches, or migraines. Although the liver meridians do not flow through the uterus, the meridians flow past the uterus, and so it is dependent on proper liver function and free flowing movement of chi and blood. If there is blockage of chi, a build up of fibroids and lumps can occur in the breasts and uterus that may develop into cancer.

Other signs of unbalanced liver chi may appear as problems in the eyes, since a branch of the liver meridian flows through them. Signs of deficient liver chi manifest as blurred vision, dry or swollen eyes, and floaters—three side effects that are certainly not pleasant for anyone. Conversely, eyestrain can lead to unbalanced liver chi. Liver function also influences tendons and ligaments. Blood deficiency in these areas can create spasms or sluggish movement in the joints. The fingernails and toenails are also under the influence of the liver. Nails that are pale and brittle, chip easily, have ridges, and are missing the half moon at the base may indicate poor nourishment and deficient liver chi.

According to macrobiotic principles, extreme foods can cause liver energy to rise too quickly. It may also lead to stagnation when toxins build up, overworking the liver. For example, tropical foods such as bananas are too extreme for temperate climates. Overeating extreme foods can disrupt the balance of the liver, causing migraines.

Migraines may also indicate unhealthy or ungrounded intestines, which provide downward flowing energy. This downward, contracting energy can best be seen in the autumn when the leaves fall off the trees and the vegetation contracts to the roots to prepare for the cold weather. The energy of the intestines has a downward, condensing, gathering, accumulating quality, which helps control the rising liver energy.

When the large intestine energy stagnates, the liver energy gets stuck in the head, rather than circulating throughout the body. Signs of intestinal problems may include

chronic constipation, lower abdominal pain, diarrhea, and gas. Frontal migraines are often related to constipation. Eating a refined food diet, a high-stress lifestyle, and antibiotics destroys beneficial bacteria in the intestines responsible for nutrient absorption and manufacture. Intestinal parasites, yeast infections, and an increase in the permeability of the intestinal wall may also result. These conditions are known as intestinal dysbiosis, and may also be related to migraines, as well as chronic vaginitis, arthritis, autoimmune diseases, and food allergies. Examples of extreme foods that may weaken the intestines and cause stagnation are over consumption of meat, white flour, caffeine, alcohol, and dairy products.

## **A Light at the End of the Migraine Tunnel**

Eating a macrobiotic diet composed of whole grains and vegetables supports the liver and intestinal function, as well as the other organ systems. Foods that particularly support liver function are those with rising energy such as barley, green leafy vegetables, leeks, and lighter cooked dishes. Foods that support healthy intestinal function are miso and pickles, which inoculate the intestines with beneficial bacteria. Burdock root and brown rice provide downward flowing, grounding energy. Home remedies for relieving migraines include the ume sho kuzu drink for frontal or left side migraines (or ame kuzu for rear or right side migraines), and dried daikon with shiitake mushroom tea (for over consumption of greasy oily foods).

The ability of umeboshi plums to neutralize both extreme acid and alkaline conditions and improve the blood and body fluid circulation makes them beneficial to both the liver and intestines. Baked umeboshi and umeboshi pits also remove unfriendly intestinal bacteria, painful gas, and diarrhea. Shiitake mushrooms are good for relaxing a stressed body to support the free and easy movement of chi. Ginger compresses on the intestines help improve circulation, relieve tension, and loosen stagnation.

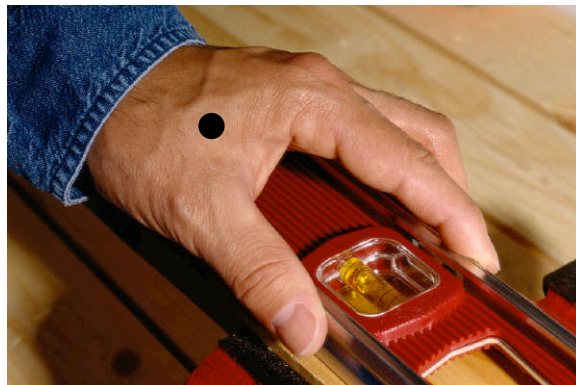
Acupressure points for relieving migraines are gallbladder 20, liver 3, and large intestine 4. Pressing the large intestine 4 point for two minutes helps to relieve constipation and congestion in the digestive system that cause frontal headaches. Massaging the temples is also helpful for relieving the pain of migraines.



Gall Bladder 20



Liver 3



Large Intestine 4

When we practice macrobiotics, we are living in accord with nature, the definition “large life.” The macrobiotic person takes responsibility for his or her own health in a holistic view and focuses on healing many levels beyond the physical body. If we discover the areas of the body affected by disease, we can create balance in other areas of the body, harmonizing the emotions, mind, and spirit as well. Basically, we can live large in the literal sense.

Macrobiotics is about living a life filled with health, happiness, and freedom according to your personal dream. One of my favorite quotes that illustrates this idea of living according to one’s dream is from Thomas Merton, in *The Man in the Sycamore Tree*:

*If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the things I want to live for. Between those two answers you can determine the identity of any person.*

With this presentation, I hope that you have moved one step closer to understanding macrobiotics and realizing your dream so that you, too, can live the large life and get rid of those migraines for good!

# Recipes

## Ume Sho Kuzu Tea

Frontal or Left Side Migraines:

1 t. kuzu  
1 cup, plus 2-3 T. cold water  
½-1 umeboshi plum  
½ t. shoyu

1. Dissolve kuzu in 2-3 tablespoons cold water.
2. Add 1 cup cold water to kuzu-water mixture.
3. Bring to boil over low flame, stirring constantly to avoid lumping.
4. When liquid turns from opaque to translucent, add ½ to 1 umeboshi plum paste.
5. Reduce flame and add shoyu.
6. Stir and simmer 2-3 minutes.
7. Drink while hot.

## Ame Kuzu Tea

Rear or Right Side Migraines:

1 heaping teaspoon kuzu  
1 cup, plus 2-3 T. cold water  
½ cup apple juice

1. Dissolve kuzu in 2-3 T. cold water. Add another cup of cold water. Add the apple juice.
2. Place this mixture in a saucepan and bring to boil over a medium flame, stirring constantly to avoid lumping, until the liquid becomes translucent. Drink while hot.

## Dried Daikon Shiitake Tea

Over Consumption of Greasy Oily Foods

½ cup dried daikon, rinsed  
1 shiitake mushroom, soaked (save the soaking water) and then sliced  
2 ½ cups spring water (including shiitake soaking water)

1. Add dried daikon, shiitake, and water to a saucepan and bring to boil.

2. Cover and lower the flame. Simmer 15 to 20 minutes, then strain.
3. Drink while hot, warm, or room temperature.



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## Julie S. Ong's Bio

Author of the book ***The Everything® Guide to Macrobiotics***, Julie S. Ong is a Kushi Institute certified macrobiotic counselor, providing support and guidance for a wholistic way of life. She is also an ordained minister and spiritual life coach, specializing in inner wisdom awareness to awaken the healer within.

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