



bi-monthly newsletter focusing on migraine awareness and education.

HEADquarters Migraine Management Newsletter

Empowering headache sufferers to help themselves

October 2006

Greetings!

in this issue

- MEDICATION NEWS TID-BITS
- Headaches: Better Migraine Coping Through Biofeedback, by guest author Luke Patrick, Ph.D

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In the last issue, we reviewed the relationship between headaches and anxiety. Given this well-established connection, promotion of the relaxation response is a key goal for many seeking to reduce the frequency and intensity of headaches.

It would be nice if stress reduction were as simple as popping your favorite CD into the stereo or kicking your heels up on the couch for a few minutes. Unfortunately, it's often not that easy, especially in the face of recurrent pain. Without the proper skills—that's right, skills—in place, you may not get far in your quest for the elusive relaxation response. Even after weeks of doing various exercises in deep breathing, mental imagery, and muscular relaxation, the migraineur may be left to wonder: is this stuff really going to work, or is relaxation just another gimmick to be filed away with snake oil?

Real Step-by-step Progress

With biofeedback, you can verify whether your new relaxation skills really are working. The proof is in the electronic sensor that monitors different physical functions that occur during the relaxation response. Depending on the type of biofeedback, you might see the rise and fall of your finger surface temperature on a computer monitor. Or, you might hear a tone that fluctuates with the levels of muscle tension in your forehead, neck, or shoulders. This feedback provides a window into your body's functions, and it does so in a way

MEDICATION NEWS TID-BITS



New medication idea

NuPathe, Inc, a Pennsylvania specialty pharmaceutical company, has raised \$15 million for development of its experimental product, NP 101, which will deliver sumatriptan through the skin in a "smart" patch by the use of a mild electrical field. If approved, this would be the first transdermal migraine treatment

Cluster headache sufferers, take heart

Recent research has shown efficacy for Zomig Nasal Spray in the

that is comfortable and non-invasive. With time and practice, better body awareness translates to better body control.

Once the ability to evoke a relaxation response is established through the biofeedback equipment, it becomes easier for clients to apply the relaxation skills during their daily activities. Typically, after a few weeks of practice in biofeedback, many individuals naturally begin to apply their new skills to real-life situations. Of course, a good biofeedback practitioner will go a step beyond this natural learning process, by helping the client to develop individually tailored strategies for generalizing the skills.

Advantages of Biofeedback

The enhanced learning curve that comes through biofeedback is just one of the positive aspects of this type of treatment. Many clients like the fact that biofeedback involves neither needles nor drugs. A related advantage is the fact that, unlike with various headache and pain medications, there are few if any negative side effects associated with biofeedback. Also, the fact that biofeedback is a teaching tool for relaxation means that once the skills are learned, you can continue to benefit as long as you choose to maintain practice; there is no continuing cost after treatment is completed.

Finding a Practitioner

As in all areas of medicine and allied health, there are highly effective biofeedback practitioners as well as less skilled ones. If you are interested in finding a good clinician, you should plan to do a little research. Your primary care physician, neurologist, or migraine headache specialist may have information about where to find biofeedback providers in your area. Additionally, two good internet resources are the websites of the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback (aapb.org) and the Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (bcia.org).

When you contact a potential provider, it's a good idea to ask how long they've worked in biofeedback, what health conditions they have treated, and whether they are certified in biofeedback. Although there are effective clinicians who are not formally certified, finding a practitioner who has met certification requirements helps you to be more assured of your choice in a practitioner. Biofeedback clinicians who work with migraine headache are often masters or doctoral level psychologists, but you may also find practitioners in

treatment of cluster headache. While many of you may already have been using it, prescribed in an off-label fashion, this new research, slated to be published in the November issue of Archives of Neurology, will bring much-needed renewed focus to the disease state and may help achieve reimbursement from insurance companies.

Anti-inflammatory safety

A new, comprehensive meta-analysis of anti-inflammatory medications with COX-2 activity was recently published in JAMA. This shows that there is no early "safe" period for rofecoxib (Vioxx). There is cardiac risk for celecoxib (Celebrex) at doses higher than 200 mg/day; risks at lower doses are uncertain. There is also some degree of risk for heart attack with these medications: diclofenac (Voltaren), meloxicam (Mobic), etoricoxib (Arcoxia—not available in the US), indomethacin (Indocin), and probably, ibuprofen. The editorial states the following: "Meta-analyses of randomized clinical trials and observational studies agree that naproxen is neutral for

counseling, physical therapy, and other allied health professions. What's most important from a consumer standpoint is that you find a professional who has specific experience in treating headache conditions

What About Insurance?

The willingness of health insurance companies to reimburse for biofeedback therapy varies among insurance carriers as well as among different health conditions. Fortunately, because the effectiveness of biofeedback for migraine is particularly well-documented, the chance of receiving insurance reimbursement is often greater than for other health conditions. Contact your insurance provider for further information, and solicit assistance from health care professionals familiar with your history and diagnosis. As an alternative to direct insurance, some individuals may be able to use flexible healthcare spending accounts or make affordable out-of-pocket payments. Such options are well-justified by the pain relief and improved functioning that the therapy can provide.

From Understanding to Ability

The challenge of using relaxation skills to control migraines is not so much in understanding the connection between mind and body (you've already figured that out); the challenge is in building new skills to override the automatic and often subtle effects of anxiety on migraine pattern and intensity. If you're willing to explore, biofeedback can help to light the way.

MI risk." If you are taking one of these medications, even if you are taking over-the-counter ibuprofen or naproxen sodium, please discuss these risks with your physician. The study also identifies some risks to kidney function in addition to heart risks

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