

COGNITIVE THERAPY and BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Anxiety and depression co-occur with headaches at a high rate. They are often reported as headache "triggers", or they may result from or simply co-occur with headaches. We recommend that patients who report mood disturbances learn stress-management techniques. Cognitive therapy is a present-oriented, problem-focused approach to mood and pain management. Patients practice identifying and assessing their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors in order to determine whether or not they promote physical and emotional well-being. A very popular non-drug intervention.

Cognitive behavioral therapy emphasizes the importance of your mental attitude in managing stress. The headache sufferer learns to pay attention to negative thought patterns that occur as a reaction to pain and other stressors. For example, people who experience chronic pain frequently develop habits of catastrophizing (immediately expecting the worst, which leads to anxiety and more pain), getting angry (which creates physiological reactions that promote pain), feeling hopeless and helpless (which leads to withdrawing from friends and family, and to over- or under-medicating). Changing thoughts and behaviors is often a very important step toward managing pain.

Many patients combine cognitive behavioral therapy sessions with biofeedback training. Together, these approaches provide an excellent accelerated course in relaxation training for mind and body.