Think Twice Before Scarfing Down That Glass of Ice Water

Drinking ice-cold water could negatively affect your health—particularly if you suffer from migraines.

August 10, 2021 By Kate Ferguson

On a hot summer's day chugging down a frosty glass of ice water may seem like the move. But a number of findings published in various medical journals suggest that some people, particularly those who regularly suffer from severe migraines, may incur a painful response to this ice cube-laden beverage, reports BestLifeOnline.com.

According to the Migraine Research Foundation, migraines affect 39 million men, women and children in the United States and 1 billion people worldwide. The symptoms of this neurological condition typically include a severe throbbing recurring pain that frequently occurs on one side of the head, although migraines sometimes target both sides of the noggin.

Studies showed that people who routinely experience migraines were the most likely to be harmed by drinking ice water. In a 2019 review of inquiries published in Current Neurology and Neuroscience Reports, researchers learned that ice water triggered more painful effects than ice cubes.

Study findings published in Cephalalgia in 2001 showed that drinking ice water sparked headaches from the beverage touching the palates of participants who were sensitive to cold. (For the study, scientists recruited 669 women and gave them a five-ounce glass of ice water to sip through a straw.)

Researchers also noted that those women who previously experienced at least one migraine within the year prior to the study were twice as likely as individuals who didn't suffer a headache to feel their heads pounding after drinking ice water.

In 2012, scientists published findings from another study examining how these ice-related headaches developed in the FASEB Journal. The participants in this investigation had also slurped ice water through a straw that researchers instructed them to place against the roof of their mouth.

According to Jorge Serrador, PhD, an associate professor in the Department of Pharmacology,

Physiology & Neuroscience at Rutgers University and the study's author, drinking icy water this way can abruptly cause an increase in blood flow to the anterior cerebral artery in the brain, causing brain freeze. (Serrador likened this pain to the kind migraine sufferers feel.)

So what's the takeaway? Don't sip ice water through a straw, especially if it's touching your palate, and don't drink freezing cold water.

Interestingly, findings from a 2005 study of 18 people with migraines found that individuals who upped the amount of water they drank to 1.5 liters each day decreased their headache time by 21 hours over a two-week period and reported feeling less excruciating pain when a migraine struck.

To learn more about factors that can trigger migraines, read "Got Migraines? Blame Faulty Genes" and "Chemical Culprit Uncovered as a Potent Potential Trigger of Migraines."

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