

'Migraines ruined my life until I tried acupuncture'

Charlie Camilleri, 54, tells Lucy Elkins how she cured years of crippling headaches

Charlie, an artist, is married to Henry, 55. They have two grown-up children. Until recently, if I left the house without painkillers I would start to panic. The idea of being caught without any way of relieving one of my migraines was frightening.

They struck without much warning. I would get a blinding pain on the left-hand side of my head that would spread and make me feel as if my brain was about to explode. The pain would radiate into my shoulders and my neck would feel stiff. Shortly after the pain started, I was violently sick. This lasted up to three days and all I could do was lie in a darkened room. I felt as if I was missing out on life, as plans would have to be abandoned. Even on a good day I would worry, "When is the next migraine going to strike?"

My mother suffered from migraines and, like hers, mine started in my early twenties. Initially, I would only have one every few months. My GP prescribed Imigran, a type of tablet known as a triptan, which is supposed to reduce the duration and severity of the migraine. It did little for me and, by my late thirties, I was getting a migraine two or three times a month. The only time I was free of migraines was during my two pregnancies, but they soon started again. People who talk about a migraine as if it is nothing more than a bad headache have clearly never had one.

My GP referred me to a neurologist where I was prescribed beta-blockers, which work for some people, but had a limited effect with me. I needed to take painkillers on top of everything else just to cope with the pain. I gave up my residential letting business to reduce stress and it did

help, but still my life was ruled by my migraines.

Then, about four years ago, a friend suggested I try acupuncture. I was keen to try anything and felt I was rattling with tablets, which were having little effect.

I saw a naturopath who asked about my lifestyle, as well as the physical symptoms. She suggested intensive acupuncture, three times a week for a month, and a special blend of herbs to take daily. She also said I should gradually reduce the medication I took, and suggested I cut out all wheat and dairy from my diet. This was difficult, as my husband is Italian and we eat a lot of pasta, but I had rice or rice noodles instead. Within three months I was having fewer and less powerful attacks. Because I could see an improvement, it made my new regime much easier to stick



to. The acupuncture was gradually reduced to once a month and, after six months, migraines were becoming a rarity. It's now been two years since I had the last one.

I have an occasional acupuncture session and even though I do indulge in a bit of pasta and bread, I've never felt better. I can book a holiday or arrange to see friends without fear that my plans will be ruined by a migraine. My life has been transformed and I am much more relaxed. *For more information on naturopathy or to locate a registered naturopath in your area, visit naturopathy.org.za or call 012 809 1277. w&h*

Do you suffer from migraines? Help is at hand

+ **MIGRAINE** affects about 18% of women and 6% of men worldwide. The Headache Clinic in Parktown North, Johannesburg investigates the underlying causes of migraines and works to treat this cause. One of the most common underlying causes of migraines is muscular tension around the neck and jaw, which is caused by stress. Women are more prone to migraines, as fluctuating hormone levels make the blood vessels in the scalp more likely to dilate, which is thought to cause migraines. The majority of the Clinic's patients are treated successfully

without medication.

SA's top medical headache specialists will be giving free talks to headache and migraine sufferers to mark International Headache Awareness week from 6 to 12 June. The seminar will be taking place at 5.30pm on Monday, 7 June at The Headache Clinic's offices on 45 Empire Road, Parktown. Pre-booking is essential as space is limited – e-mail info10@headclin.co.za or call 0861 678 911 to secure your place.

To find out more about The Headache Clinic, visit headacheclinic.co.za or call 0861 678 911.