

## A NEW LIFE

**KANCHI GANDHI, 21**  
Suffering from migraine for the past two years

At 19, Kanchi Gandhi had her first attack of migraine and her vivacious life changed dramatically. Over the next two years, the headache became severe, the pain came any time of the day and lasted up to seven hours. Recently, she went for the new treatment—headache management. The doctor took down her history of illness and she was started on a course of flunarizine and domperidone to reduce the frequency and severity of attacks. Gandhi found to her relief that the treatment worked.

**“Frequency of the attacks is less.”**

Chande



**JYOTI CHANDE, 49**  
Had her first migraine attack when she was in Class I

Jyoti Chande used to pop Novalgin whenever she had headaches. The pain would vanish—temporarily. As she grew older, the frequency and the intensity of attacks rose. Five months ago, she consulted a headache specialist. The triggers were identified as idli, tamarind and lemon juice. She was put on a dose of 10 tablets (valproate, propranolol and amitryptiline) a day. Now her daily dose is down to just three tablets.

**“Earlier my doctor gave me Novalgin.”**

anxiety drugs may also help. Headache management advocates relaxation exercises and “bio-feedback”. Bio-feedback enables the patient to monitor the involuntary physical responses—breathing, pulse and heart rate, temperature, muscle tension and brain activity—with and without relaxation techniques. Seeing the difference for oneself has a strong psychological effect in diminishing the pain. “Relaxation exercises are as important as medication, perhaps even more so,” says M.M. Mehndiratta, professor of neurology, G.B. Pant Hospital, Delhi.

tacks. These medicines were initially developed to treat other diseases like seizures, depression or hypertension. Preventive medicines include antidepressants, beta blockers, calcium channel blockers (like flunarizine) and NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs). Triptans (like sumatriptan) are the newest drug in this class used specifically to treat migraine. They work on brain receptors, helping to restore the serotonin balance.

Though signs of migraine manifest early most people ignore them, little realising that preventive measures can



**“Migraine patients are medically orphaned.”**

**K. RAVISHANKAR, neurologist and headache specialist**

Far more difficult to tackle is migraine. Clinicians call it a “vascular” headache, caused by an initial constriction and later dilation of blood vessels in the brain in response to changing levels of serotonin, a key brain chemical. There is a strong genetic link: 80 per cent of migraine sufferers report a family history of the disease. Migraine can be triggered by anything: light, sound, stress or certain types of food. But these are only triggers, not the cause. Classic migraine involves “aura”—seeing stars and flashes of light, cloudy vision, followed by headache. Some may even hallucinate. Mercifully most migraine sufferers have the simpler variety, a pounding pain in the head. But no two migraines are ever the same.

Till recently, migraine had most doctors at a loss. Some even prescribed sleeping pills. Now the focus is on preventive medicine used to reduce the frequency, severity and length of at-

radically help. Homemaker Jyoti Chande, 49, had her first headache when she was in Class I. “The family doctor would give me Novalgin and the headache would go,” she remembers. But as she grew older, the attacks got worse. At times, the throbbing in her head would start at 3 a.m.. She would throw up and was unable to eat or drink anything for the entire day. Married at 22, Chande had to live with such attacks taking place at least twice a week.

Five months ago, she saw a headache management specialist. Diagnosis revealed that her migraine was triggered by idli, imli and lemon juice. She was initially put on a dose of 10 tablets a day (see box). Now with the onset of the monsoon, she will be taken off all drugs. She just needs to avoid trigger foods. For the first time in almost half a century, Chande can look forward to a normal life. And to becoming the perfect example of how effective headache management is. ■