

A CASE STUDY

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PATIENT

Profile: Forty-three year old graphic designer

Condition: Migraine Headaches

When her five and seven year-old children complained that sometimes they felt like they didn't have a mother, it prompted this patient to try yet another treatment for her debilitating headaches. Two to three times a month for 20 years, this woman would have a three-day migraine; one whole day spent in a dark room in bed sandwiched between two sick and unproductive days – in addition to jabbing pain. Every day, she experienced a moderate muscle contraction headache as well.

The migraines, which occurred at the middle and end of her menstrual cycles, were possibly hormonally induced. And so it was the patient's gynecologist who referred her to the biofeedback and stress reduction program, saying in her letter of referral that the patient "has had years of attempted medical therapy with all possible effective medication and has had no relief."

In addition to the headaches, the patient was experiencing emotional strain around what she identified as a "mid-life crossroads," about career and motherhood. As a result of the patient's goals to eliminate her headaches and clarify her life's direction, a double path approach consisting of the program and psychotherapy was designed for her.

The patient's symptoms subsided in stages. She started treatment in April 1993, and experienced her last migraine for a long time six weeks later. Dr. King wrote to the referring doctor that her pre-treatment moderate daily headaches were also under control; only one a week, less intense and lasting a shorter period of time.

In another follow-up letter in November, with the patient still migraine-free, Dr. King wrote: The patient's "skills were put to a test over this last half year. She has been coping with significant family illness and subsequently the death of her father. She has clearly demonstrated the ability to regulate the impact of stress on her physical health."

Eighteen months after her last migraine, the patient's mother moved in with her for five weeks. She interrupted her practice with the change in her household and had one setback--a mild migraine lasting only a day. She resumed her self-regulation routine and today continues to live without migraines.

The patient no longer struggles with her mid-life crossroads, feeling equipped to manage a career and children. She's more patient with her children and shows greater ease with difficult clients. She has found a balance she says--more in control of her body and more at peace with herself.