



2026 INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

SPEAKER

Gudrun Gossrau,
MD

TOPIC

Scents, Chemicals & the Migraine Brain

TITLE & ORGANIZATION

Professor of Neurology, Headache and Pain
Specialist, Technische Universität Dresden TUD,
Germany

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are everywhere in our daily lives, found in many household cleaning products, glues, paints, cosmetics, and detergents.
- VOCs can trigger migraine through chemical activation of the trigeminal nerve, even if the substance is odorless.
- The trigeminal and olfactory systems exist in a balance; decreasing olfactory input can make the trigeminal system more hypersensitive to pain.
- Approximately one-third of migraine patients have scent-induced attacks.
- Approximately two-thirds of people with migraine have osmophobia (sensitivity to smell) during an attack.
- Smell training using pleasant, nontriggering scents (like rose or coffee) can improve olfactory function without inducing attacks.

KEY TREATMENTS

- High-resolution EEG (electroencephalography)
- Olfactory function assessments
- Smell training (therapeutic protocol)

NOTABLE QUOTES

"The osmophobia and fear [of] smell seems to really change the behavior towards smells. And as a reaction, or as a result of this, you avoid ... smells and you lose a part of your ability to smell things."

"If the olfaction goes too low, you have too much trigeminal activation, too much migraine. And then you have some balance, it's better for you."

PRACTICAL STEPS

- Ventilate new furniture, flooring, or recently painted rooms thoroughly before spending extended time in those spaces.
- Consider a "smell training" regimen using one or two nontriggering, enjoyable scents to maintain olfactory health.
- Advocate for workplace accommodations, such as scent-free zones or the ability to move away from areas with heavy chemical odors.