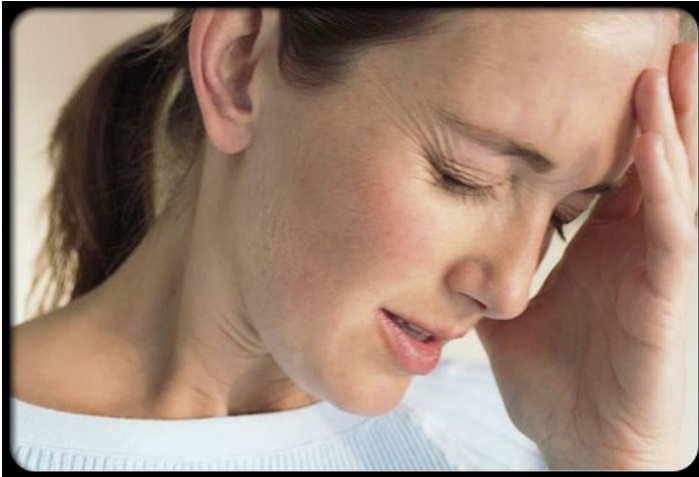


Headache - A Visual Guide to Migraine Headaches



What Is a Migraine?

A migraine is a headache with throbbing pain that is usually worse on one side of the head. The pain is often severe enough to hamper daily activities and may last from four hours to three days if untreated. More than one in 10 Americans, including one in 6 women, have migraines, but many have been told mistakenly that they have a sinus or tension headache. Foods, stress, and hormones can be migraine triggers.



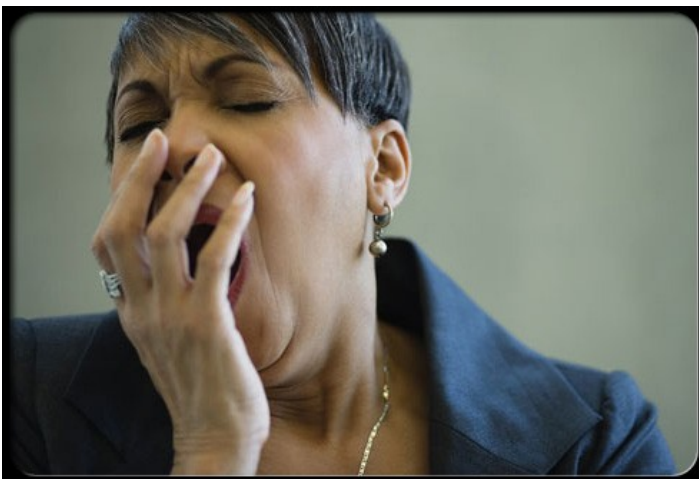
Migraine Symptoms

Throbbing pain typically occurs on one side near the temples, forehead, and eyes. Migraines can make you very sensitive to light, sound, or mild exertion, such as climbing the stairs. Many people have nausea, vomiting, or vision problems. The pain can be disabling, forcing people to miss work or other activities.



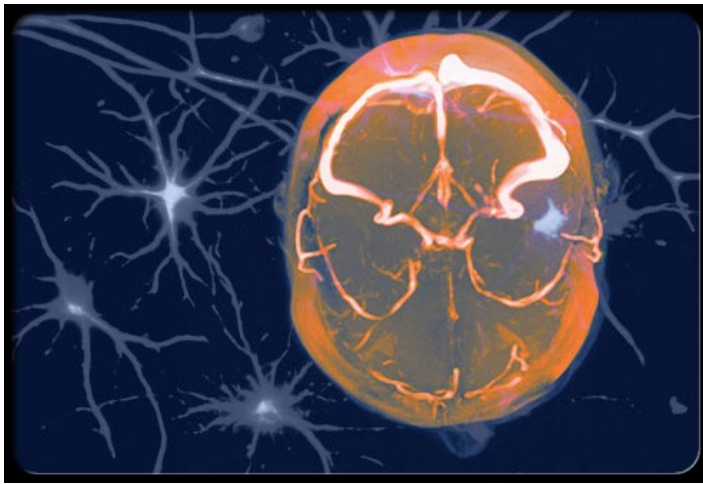
Migraine With Aura

About 20% of people who suffer from migraines will have an aura about 20 minutes to an hour before the pain. They may see flashing lights, wavy lines, or dots, or they may have blurry vision or blind spots. These are called "classic migraines."



Migraine Warning Signs

Some people may have a change in mood before a migraine begins. They may become more excitable or irritable or depressed. Others may detect a sensation, such as a funny smell or taste. They may feel more fatigued, yawn frequently, or experience muscle tension. About 1 in 4 people experience this prodrome phase, which can occur as early as 24 hours before any head pain.



What Causes a Migraine?

The exact cause of migraines is still not well understood, but the problem is considered to be neurological (related to the nervous system). It is believed that brain chemicals, blood vessels, and nerves of the brain are involved.



Trigger: Flashing Lights

Migraines may be set off by some specific cause, such as flickering lights. This could be a reflection from snow or water or from fluorescent bulbs or television or movie screens. Wearing polarizing sunglasses outside and using daylight spectrum fluorescent bulbs inside may help.



Trigger: Anxiety and Stress

Emotional stress is a common trigger of migraines. While it's impossible to completely avoid stress, relaxation exercises can help you cope. Inhale and exhale slowly, letting the air fill you and then deflate like a balloon. Some people find that thinking of a peaceful scene or listening to favorite music can help.



Trigger: Lack of Food or Sleep

It's important for people prone to migraines to have a regular pattern of meals and sleep. Low blood sugar from skipping meals can trigger a migraine. Eating too much sugar also can cause a spike, then a "crash" in blood sugar. Drink water throughout the day to avoid dehydration and sleep at least 6 to 8 hours a night.



Trigger: Hormonal Changes

For many women, migraines are tied to their menstrual cycle, occurring either a few days before or during their period, when estrogen levels drop. Some women may benefit from anti-inflammatory medication before their headaches begin, or hormonal birth control such as pills, patches, or rings. Others may have no benefit or worse migraines with hormonal birth control.



Trigger: Headache Foods

Migraine sufferers often report that certain foods trigger their headaches. Common culprits include MSG, red wine, cheese, chocolate, soy sauce, and processed meats. However, scientific studies haven't confirmed any particular food as a migraine trigger.



Trigger: Tyramine

Aged, fermented, and stored foods have higher levels of tyramine, a substance created from the breakdown of the amino acid tyrosine. Tyramine may cause blood vessels to constrict then expand, and it may be a trigger for some migraines. Some headache experts advise limiting fermented or aged foods, such as cheese, soy sauce, pickles, and pepperoni.

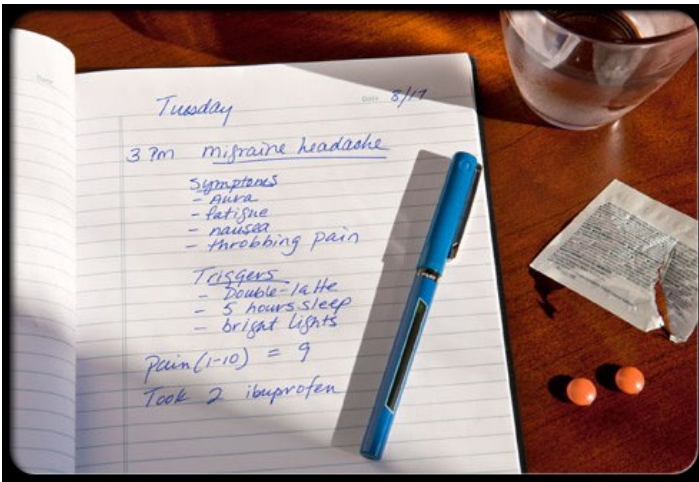


Caffeine: Help or Hindrance?

When combined with some pain medications, caffeine can help provide relief. Most migraine sufferers can drink a cup or two a day of coffee without any problems. However, too much caffeine can lead to headaches when the stimulant effect wears off.

Tracking Personal Triggers

Find out what triggers your migraines by keeping a headache diary. Each time you suffer from a migraine, make a note about the warning signs (the "prodrome"), triggers, and severity. If you can discover some of your personal triggers, you may be able to avoid future headaches.



Who Gets Migraines?

Women are three times more likely to have migraines than men. If you have a close relative with migraines, you are much more likely to have migraines, too. Experts believe migraines may be related to mutations in genes that affect certain areas of the brain. Migraine is also more common among people who have epilepsy, depression, asthma, anxiety, stroke, and some other neurologic and hereditary disorders.



Migraines in Children

About 5% of the children with headache problems suffer from migraines. Both boys and girls can get migraines, but after puberty they are more common among girls. Children may have symptoms other than headache, including stomach pain (abdominal migraine) or forceful and frequent vomiting (cyclic vomiting). If young children become wobbly on their feet, pale, and fussy, or have involuntary eye movements or vomiting, they may have a form of migraine called benign paroxysmal vertigo.



Diagnosing Migraine

Migraines are diagnosed primarily from symptoms, but your doctor may want to do a brain scan to rule out other causes of your headache, such as a brain tumor or bleeding in the brain. A CT scan uses special X-rays to create cross-sectional images of the brain. An MRI uses radio frequency pulses and a magnetic field to create images of the brain.



Fill in how many days in the last three months you ...

3	Could not go to work or school ...
7	Did less than half your usual amount in your job or schoolwork ...
8	Could not do any household work ...
5	Did less than half your usual amount of household work?
5	Missed family, social or leisure activities ...

because of your headaches?

28
SCORE

GRADING	0-5	Minimal or infrequent impact	Grade I
	6-10	Mild or infrequent impact	Grade II
	11-20	Moderate impact	Grade III
	20+	Severe impact	Grade IV

Calculating Your Headache Burden

Before you begin treatment, your doctor may want to assess your "headache burden" -- how much your life is affected by your migraines. A simple questionnaire asks how many times you have missed work, school, or family or leisure activities because of your migraines.



Treatment: Over-the-Counter Drugs

Combinations of common pain relievers and anti-inflammatories may help: aspirin, naproxen sodium, ibuprofen, acetaminophen. Some have been formulated specifically to treat migraines. However, overuse may actually make headaches worse or may lead to ulcers or other gastrointestinal problems.



Treatment: Triptans

Triptans, the most common medication prescribed for migraines, are most effective when taken early in an attack. Common triptans include Amerge, Axert, Frova, Imitrex, Maxalt, Relpax, Treximet, and Zomig. People with high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and other conditions may not be able to take triptans. And because of possible serious drug interactions, you should talk to your doctor about other medications you take such as antidepressant or antiseizure medicine. Side effects of triptans include nausea, dizziness, tingling, numbness, and chest pain.



Treatment: Ergotamines

If triptans don't give you relief, your doctor may prescribe dihydroergotamine (Migranal) or ergotamines (Cafergot or Migergot) as tablets, nasal sprays, or injections. These drugs narrow the blood vessels and can cause nausea, dizziness, muscle pain, or a bad taste in the mouth. They are not usually as effective as triptans and also have some interactions with other drugs.



Is Your Treatment Working?

After you have treated two or three headaches, ask yourself some simple questions. Are you getting the relief you need? If not, you should ask your doctor about altering the treatment. Be sure you take your medications early in the attack -- at least within two hours of migraine pain.



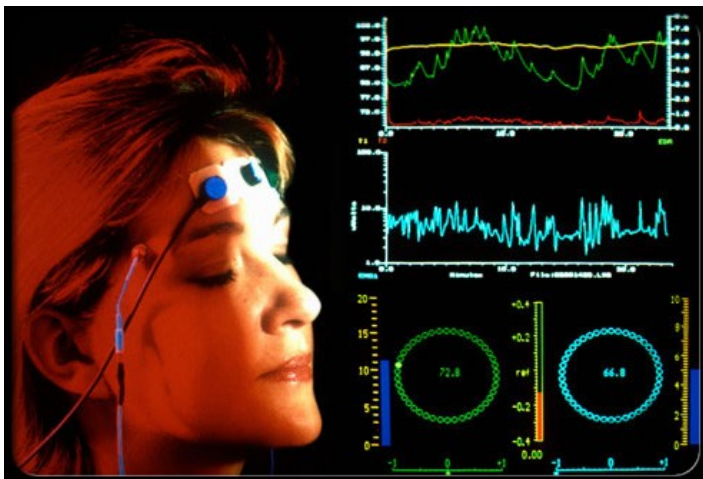
Limits of Medication Use

Overuse of medications can sometimes lead to chronic headaches. You shouldn't take prescribed medicines more than two times per week. You can get rid of the chronic headaches by tapering and discontinuing your medication -- under a doctor's supervision. Pain medicines containing narcotics should be taken only when other medications fail to relieve pain because they can be habit-forming.



Treatment: Preventive Medicines

If your migraines are frequent or very severe, you may need to take a medicine every day to prevent attacks. Timolol (Blocadren), divalproex sodium (Depakote), propranolol (Inderal), and topiramate (Topamax) are common, approved preventive medicines. They are drugs that were designed to treat high blood pressure or to prevent seizures.

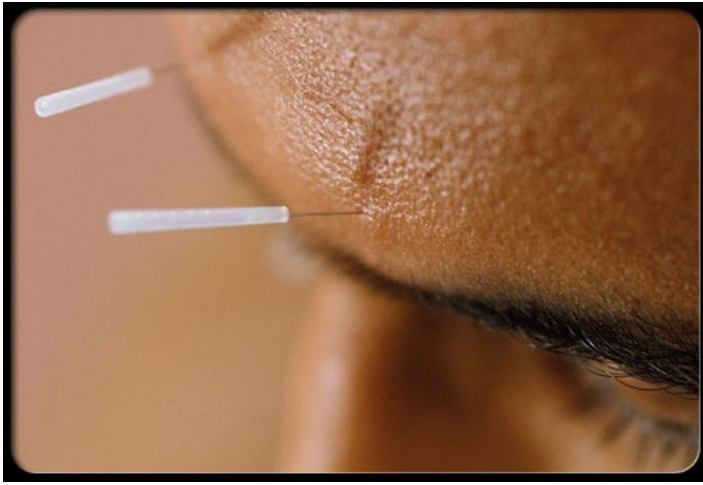


Alternative Therapy: Biofeedback

Biofeedback and relaxation training can give you relief that is similar to the help you get from medications. Biofeedback uses a monitor to train you to recognize the onset of muscle tension and changes in body temperature that are signals of stress.

Alternative Therapy: Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a form of Chinese medicine that uses very fine needles inserted in specific spots to balance the body's energy flow. Some researchers have found acupuncture causes the brain to release chemicals that affect pain. However, studies on the effectiveness of acupuncture for migraine symptoms has been mixed.



An Advantage of Aging

Migraines most often strike in the prime of life – between the ages of 20 and 60. While elderly people still get migraines, they often decrease in severity and frequency as we age, or even disappear entirely. Good management of migraines may help you get rid of your migraines for good.



When You Need Quick Care

Any new headache that is unusually severe or lasts more than a couple of days should be checked by a doctor. It's also important to let your health care provider know if the pattern of your headaches changes -- for example, if there are new triggers. If you have a headache accompanied by paralysis, confusion, fever, or stiff neck, seek emergency medical care.



Source: http://www.medicinenet.com/migraine_headaches_pictures_slideshow/article.htm