

HEADACHE, MIGRAINE



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An intense, incapacitating headache usually on one side of the head, accompanied by other symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and visual problems. They can last from 2 to 72 hours. Episodes of migraines can occur weekly in some people, while others may have less than one a year. Migraines affect both sexes, but are more common in females.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The nature of attacks varies between persons and from time to time in the same person. Symptoms of a classic migraine attack appear in the following sequence:

- An aura that precedes the headache. This may affect vision, hearing or smell.
- The most common symptom is the inability to see clearly, followed by seeing bright spots and zig-zag patterns. Visual disturbances may last several minutes or several hours, but they disappear once the headache begins.
- Dull, boring pain in the temple that spreads to the entire side of the head. Pain becomes intense and throbbing.
- Nausea and vomiting.

In other types of migraine attack, the above symptoms (vision disturbances, headache or vomiting) may be absent, or other symptoms may be present. Some persons become pale, with bloodshot eyes and a runny nose or eyes.

CAUSES

Constriction, then dilation and inflammation of blood vessels that go to the scalp and brain. Headache begins when they widen again. Attacks may be triggered by:

- Tension. Emotional problems are probably the most common reason for migraine attacks, but headaches don't necessarily coincide with emotional upset. They often occur on weekends when stress is decreased.
- Menstruation.
- Use of oral contraceptives.
- Fatigue.
- Consumption of alcohol or certain foods.
- Missing meals.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress.
- Family history of migraines.
- Smoking.
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Use of many prescription and non-prescription drugs.
- Sleep deprivation, or excess sleep for some.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Reduce stress in your life where possible.
- Some prescription drugs prevent attacks in some persons.
- Avoid those factors that trigger attacks.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Symptoms can be controlled with treatment.
- Pattern of symptoms and frequency of attacks can change over time.
- Reduction in severity and frequency as you get older.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Rare status migraine (lasts over 72 hours leading to dehydration, exhaustion and brain inflammation).
- An addiction to the pain medicine used to control symptoms (rare).



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

• Usually no diagnostic tests are required, however, laboratory blood studies or CT scan of the head may be performed only to rule out other disorders.

At the first sign of a migraine attack:

- Apply a cold cloth or ice pack to your head, or splash your face with cold water.
- Lie down in a quiet, dark room for several hours. Wedge pillows to support head. Relax and sleep if possible.
- Minimize noise, light and odors (especially cooking odors and tobacco smoke).
- Don't read.
- Additional information available from the National Headache Foundation, 5252 N. Western Ave., Chicago, IL 60625, (800) 843-2256.

MEDICATIONS

- No single drug is preferable or effective. A wide variety of drugs can be prescribed for migraine symptoms and prevention. Follow all prescription instructions carefully.
- Ergotamines (contain caffeine) in oral form, suppository or inhaler.
- Aspirin, acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Drugs that combine acetaminophen and a narcotic (codeine).
- Antihistamines to expand blood vessels.
- Antiemetics to decrease nausea and vomiting.
- Vasoconstrictors to narrow blood vessels.
- Sumatriptan (Imitrex) in self-administered subcutaneous (under the skin) injection, or oral tablet.
- Beta-adrenergic or calcium channel blockers or tricyclic antidepressants to prevent attacks, if headaches are so frequent or severe that you can't function normally. These medications may have undesirable side effects and may not help everyone.

ACTIVITY

- Rest during attacks. Between attacks, exercise to achieve maximum fitness.
- Do not drive or use dangerous machinery during an attack.

DIET

Because some attacks are caused by foods, such as cheese or chocolate, keep a record of what you ate before each attack. Avoid foods that seem to trigger migraine attacks. Otherwise, no special diet is necessary.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has a migraine attack that persists longer than 24 hours, despite treatment.
- Frequent migraine attacks interfere with normal life.