

Migraine Headache

Unless they have personally experienced a migraine headache, most people do not realize how incapacitating the pain of a migraine can be. This pain can keep a

person from functioning normally and performing daily activities.

It is estimated that migraine headaches affect 28 million people in the United States.

An article in the November 22/29, 2000, issue of *JAMA* discusses different strategies for treating people who have migraine headaches.

SYMPTOMS OF A MIGRAINE HEADACHE:

(Every individual is different and may experience some symptoms and not others, or in various combinations.)

- Headache pain that is moderate to severe and lasts for 4 hours to 72 hours, sometimes longer
- Throbbing pain that can be located on one side of the head; it can start on one side and spread to the other side or be on both sides
- Nausea (an upset stomach)
- Vomiting
- Sensitivity to light, sound, or odors
- Pain becomes worse when you move

Some of the above symptoms can signal even more serious conditions, so consult with a doctor.

"TRIGGERS" OF A MIGRAINE HEADACHE:

Some possible "triggers" for those susceptible to migraine headaches are

- Exposure to bright lights or loud noises
- Feeling overly tired
- Hormonal changes in women
- Lack of sleep
- Some foods, such as chocolate and some types of cheese
- Some food additives, such as nitrites, nitrates, and monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Some alcoholic beverages, such as red wine
- Stress

WHAT IS A MIGRAINE AURA?

Migraine aura refers to neurological disturbances that occur before the migraine headache begins. The neurological disturbances are usually visual, such as seeing flashing lights or experiencing small blind spots; less commonly ringing in the ears or feelings of numbness may occur. Not all people with migraine headaches experience auras.

Additional Sources: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, American Academy of Neurology, National Headache Foundation, The AMA Home Medical Library, The AMA Family Medical Guide

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KEEPING A "HEADACHE DIARY":

A diary of when you have a headache may help you determine what may influence your headaches and could give you an idea of what "triggers" you may want to eliminate or avoid. A diary can also help you see how well your medication and lifestyle changes are working.

TREATING MIGRAINE HEADACHES:

If you have severe headaches, it is important to see a doctor for evaluation and diagnosis. Medications may be used to relieve pain and restore function during attacks. Stress management strategies such as exercise, relaxation training, biofeedback, and avoiding triggers may also have a role in treatment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
Headache: Hope Through Research
800/352-9424 or www.ninds.nih.gov
- American Academy of Neurology
What Is a Migraine Headache?
651/695-1940
- National Headache Foundation
www.headaches.org
888/NHF-5552

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