

Living with Migraines

Migraine attacks are a neurological disorder accompanied by a combination of various symptoms. Severe head pain and other debilitating migraine symptoms can cause significant disruption to your daily life. Productivity at work or school is often affected when people are suffering from a migraine attack.

Migraine patients are diagnosed by process of elimination. Possible causes for migraine symptoms are ruled out by an MRI, blood analysis and other tests. Currently, there is no test that will officially diagnose a migraine disorder, making it difficult to diagnose in certain cases.

People who suffer from migraines feel intense pain on one or both sides of their head. The headache phase of a migraine typically lasts hours to days without treatment. Migraines affect everyone differently and each person has unique triggers, symptoms and intensity levels.



Migraines VS Headaches

MIGRAINES:

- Pain usually begins gradually and lasts for hours.
- Shows warning signs and other symptoms.
- Can be felt in face or neck (mistaken for sinus headache/muscle spasm).
- More intense, severe pain
- Throbbing Pain

HEADACHES

- Typically dull, deep and steady.
- Sometimes pulsing or throbbing when severe.
- Can occur without warning.
- No additional symptoms.

Triggers

There are a number of common factors known to cause migraine headaches. Factors that provoke a migraine attack are called triggers. Each person responds differently to potential triggers. It's important to know how you respond to these common triggers and what other factors provoke your migraines.



Stress - High levels of stress are commonly linked to migraine headaches.



Environmental/sensory - Sensory overload, such as bright lights, loud noises and strong smells, can cause migraine headaches.



Medications - Certain medications may increase your chances of experiencing a migraine. Discuss common medications that may trigger migraines with your doctor or pharmacist.



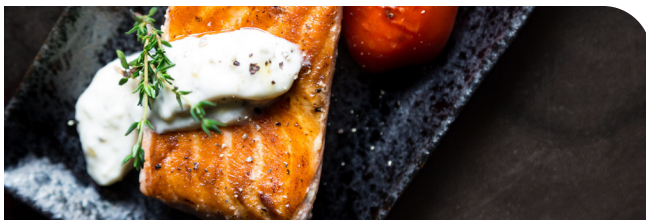
Weather - Changes in barometric pressure, heat and humidity may prompt a migraine in some cases.



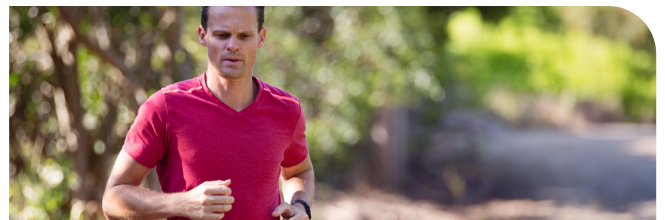
Changes to eating and sleeping patterns - Breaking normal eating and sleeping routines may cause a migraine. Dehydration, hunger, and teeth grinding at night can play a role in frequency and intensity of headaches.



Hormones - Women may experience migraine headaches as their hormone levels change before or during their periods, during pregnancy and menopause, or while taking birth control.



Nutrition - Certain foods, food additives and drinks are known migraine aggravators. Be sure to know which foods affect your migraines and to limit or abstain from alcohol use.



Physical causes - Sudden, intense physical activity may trigger a migraine. This includes high intensity activities such as sprinting, sexual intercourse and heavy weightlifting.

Four Common Migraine Attack Stages

Prodrome

The prodrome stage is also called the “pre-headache” phase. This is when early symptoms and warning signs indicate a migraine is coming. Pre-headache symptoms may occur hours or days before a migraine attack hits. Knowing your migraine warning signs can help you prepare and respond to an attack.

Prodrome symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating
- Sensitivity to light and/or sound
- Heightened sense of smell
- Pain from stimulus that wouldn't normally cause pain
- Anxiety or depression
- Fatigue
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Frequent thirst and urination
- Stiff neck
- Yawning
- Food cravings or loss of appetite

Aura

Only about 25% of migraine sufferers experience the aura phase. Aura symptoms are usually visual but can take many other forms. Symptoms often affect only one side of the body. Migraine aura typically lasts up to one hour and occurs just before the migraine headache hits. Fortunately, some who suffer from migraines are able to respond to the aura with treatment that reduces the severity of their migraine symptoms or prevents the headache from progressing into a severe migraine phase.

Aura symptoms

- Numbness, tingling or prickling of the arms, legs or face.
- Diminished vision, blurry vision or vision loss
- Shimmering, sparkling or bright flashes of light
- Confusion
- Dizziness or vertigo
- Motor weakness or temporary paralysis
- Decreased or temporary loss in hearing
- Hallucinations - hearing sounds that aren't there or smelling odors that aren't present
- Loss of ability to express or understand written or verbal speech
- Uncontrollable jerking or other movements

Headache

The third migraine phase is the headache itself. Migraine headaches often present the most extreme and the most disabling symptoms, compared to the other stages. Headache pain can range from mild to severe. People experiencing a mild migraine may not even realize it, while people enduring a severe migraine may be unwell for days. The most common migraine symptoms are nausea, throbbing pain, sensitivity to light and sensitivity to sound.

Headache symptoms

- Pulsing, drilling or throbbing headache, often one-sided
- Heightened sensitivity to light, sound, smell and/or touch
- Headache worsened with physical activity
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Tingles or numbing in extremities/face
- Hot flashes or chills
- Neck pain
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Depression, anxiety, panic
- Confusion

Postdrome

After a migraine headache, many people report the sensation of being hungover or feeling like a zombie. This is part of the fourth and final stage of a migraine attack, called the postdrome stage. Postdrome can last hours or days after a migraine headache ends.

Postdrome symptoms

- Exhaustion
 - Weakness, feeling drained
 - Depression or anxiety
 - Euphoria, giddiness or elation
 - Irritability and moodiness
 - Lower levels of concentration, comprehension and ability to focus
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Migraine Treatment

Migraine attacks are unique for every person, so it makes sense that migraine management plans would also be adjusted for each patient's experience. While there is no cure for migraines, there are many different treatment options available for each stage of an attack. Medications may be oral, injectable, a nasal spray or suppository. Suppository medications can be especially helpful for those who experience nausea or vomiting.

Treatment options are categorized by three general categories of migraine management: preventative treatment, abortive treatment and rescue treatment.

Preventative Treatment

Preventative treatment is designed to help you manage migraine attacks with a long-term approach. The goal of a preventive regimen is to decrease the frequency and intensity of migraine attacks, especially for people who regularly suffer from three or more migraines a month.

Abortive Treatment

Abortive treatments work to subdue a migraine while it's in progress. These medications act quickly and attempt to stop acute migraine pain. Unlike pain medications, which just dull the pain for a while, abortive medications try to interrupt the migraine progression in the brain. The goal for abortive treatment is to treat the migraine rapidly, cutting short its duration and restoring the patient's ability to function.

Rescue Treatment

When all else fails, have a rescue treatment plan for your migraines. Rescue treatment is used when preventative treatments have failed and abortive medications are not working or cannot be used. Rescue migraine treatment may be one single medication or a combination of drug therapies and comfort measures. Prescription-strength non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and muscle relaxants are often used as backup medications. Other drugs may target nausea, vomiting, anxiety or other migraine symptoms.

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Medication can make each patient feel differently. If you experience side effects tell your doctor.

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Nutritional Care for Migraines

Maintaining a balanced diet is key to long-term migraine management. There are many aspects of your diet and nutrition that are linked to migraine attacks. As a general rule, you should be eating a well-balanced diet with all five nutrients: carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals. Avoid skipping meals and be cautious when starting a new diet.

Understanding the effect nutrition has on your migraines can be confusing. Not every potential migraine trigger will affect you. Each migraine experiences triggers differently. In some cases, the same food or drink that triggers your migraine can also bring relief. Caffeine, for example, is commonly used to relieve migraine pain. However, if some people consume too much caffeine or if they have caffeine withdrawal, a migraine attack is likely.

Nutrition Quick Tips

Stay hydrated. Drinking plenty of water helps to avoid overheating and dehydration, which are both common migraine triggers.

Eat protein. Be sure to include protein into your diet. This nutrient helps slow the absorption of carbohydrates, which helps keep your blood sugar levels even. Maintaining your blood sugar levels can help prevent migraine attacks.

Eat often. Many migraineurs prefer to eat 5-6 smaller meals throughout the day to avoid hunger headaches and reduce the number of migraine-triggering chemicals they consume at one time. This can also help prevent weight gain, which is a contributing factor in migraine severity. Don't skip meals because hunger can trigger a migraine.

Trigger Threshold

It's especially important to remember your migraine trigger threshold when it comes to food and drinks. One specific food will not necessarily cause an attack but when combined with other migraine-provoking aggravators, it may incite a headache.

For example, drinking a glass of red wine when you're relaxing on vacation may affect you differently than when you're drinking a glass of red wine at the end of a stressful day of work.

Food diaries for migraineurs

Look for patterns that help draw a line between migraine headaches and nutrition. A migraine sufferer may want to track what he or she eats and drinks throughout the day. This can also include making note of the time of day a migraineur eats and estimating the quantity of food consumed.

Connecting nutrition information with migraine episodes can be an important step in getting control. Food diaries can help migraineurs better understand their triggers and manage their migraines. For some people, their food diaries help them plan meals in advance, which makes it easier to avoid migraine trigger foods. Migraine journals often provide a great resource to monitor all necessary information in one place.

Caffeine withdrawal headaches

Caffeine isn't necessarily bad for migraine sufferers. Many migraine medications contain caffeine because it affects blood vessels in the brain.

When a person's caffeine intake changes, however, it can lead to headaches. Migraine sufferers can trigger an attack when they drink too much or too little caffeine. Try to consume low levels of caffeine and keep daily consumption consistent.





Common Food Triggers

Migraine triggers affect everyone differently, especially when it comes to food and drink triggers. It's important to know common migraine food and drink aggravators and to understand the nutritional foundation behind prevalent triggers. It may be helpful to track the food you eat in a migraine journal to help you identify potential triggers.

The following foods may be more likely to trigger migraines:

- Alcohol (red wine, beer)
- Beans
- Cured meat (hotdogs, bacon)
- Processed foods and preservatives
- Aspartame, artificial sweetener/sugar substitute
- Yogurts and matured cheeses (aged cheddar, blue cheese, parmesan, gouda, brie)
- Pickled or canned foods
- Nuts (walnuts, cashews)
- Citrus (lemons, oranges)
- Vitamins and herbal supplements
- Chocolates and other cocoa-based products
- Caffeine (caffeine withdrawal)



Amber Specialty Pharmacy is here to help.

We offer guidance and support through our dedicated team of healthcare experts. From the beginning, we help you with the enrollment process and review your insurance coverage. We explore financial assistance opportunities to help you lower your medication costs whenever possible. Our pharmacists review your prescriptions with you - including how to take your medication and manage any side effects. Pharmacists are available 24/7 to assist you when you have questions. Our Registered Nurse and Registered Dietitian offer personalized consultations to assist you with any medically-based questions and nutritional care. We stay in touch with you regularly to remind you when it is time to refill your prescriptions. We are always here to help.

Additional Resources:

American Headache Society: AmericanHeadacheSociety.org

American Migraine Foundation:

AmericanMigraineFoundation.org

Association of Migraine Disorders: MigraineDisorders.org

Migraine.com: Migraine.com

Migraine Relief: MigraineRelief.com

More to Migraine: MoretoMigraine.com

Rethink Chronic Migraine: MyChronicMigraine.com

Speak Your Migraine: SpeakYourMigraine.com

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