

Migraine Headache

What is a migraine headache?

A migraine headache is a special kind of headache. It can last for hours or days. It may cause intense pain. You may also feel sick to your stomach or have eye problems.

What is the cause?

A migraine happens when brain chemicals don't stay balanced. You are more likely to get a migraine when:

- You are under stress.
- You are tired.
- You eat some kinds of foods or chemicals added to foods, such as MSG.
- The weather changes.
- You are around bright lights.

Women are more likely to have migraines than men. Sometimes the headaches happen around the time a woman has her period. Migraines can run in families.

What are the symptoms?

Before a migraine starts, you may:

- Not feel well.
- Lose part of your vision.
- See bright spots.
- See zigzags in front of your eyes.

Most of the time, these eye problems go away when the headache starts.

- When you have a migraine, you may:
- Have a headache that throbs or pounds (you may feel the pain more on one side of your head, or your whole head may hurt).
- Be very sensitive to light.
- Have blurred vision.
- Vomit or have nausea.
- Have numbness or feel tingling of your face or arm.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history. He or she will examine you. It may help to keep a headache diary. You should write down:

- the date and time of each migraine
- how long it lasts
- the type of pain (Is it dull or sharp? Does it throb? Do you feel pressure?)
- where it hurts.

If you are a woman, you should note:

- When you have your periods.
- If you are using birth control pills or other female hormones.

You should also write down what happened before the headache started:

- What signs did you have?
- What did you eat and drink?
- Did you use cigarettes, caffeine, alcohol, or soda?
- What time did you go to bed? What time did you get up?

If your headaches started just lately, your health care provider may recommend tests for other causes of your symptoms. You may need a brain scan or MRI scan.

How is it treated?

- You may need to take medicine to keep migraines from getting worse once they start. Take these medicines as soon as you can when you start to have signs of a migraine.
- You may need to take medicine to stop migraines from coming so often. The medicine can help prevent very bad migraines.
- You may need to try a medicine for several weeks to see if it works. Talk to your health care provider about what is best for you. You have many choices.

How long will it last?

Symptoms of a migraine headache last from a few hours to a few days. You may get migraines for the rest of your life. Most of the time, migraines happen less often as you get older.

How can I take care of myself?

As soon as the migraine starts:

- Take a pain reliever. You might try aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen. Or take the medicine your health care provider gave you.
- Rest in a quiet, dark room until you start to feel better.

Call your health care provider right away if:

- You have a fever.
- Your neck is stiff.
- You have a hard time talking.
- Your arm or leg is weak.
- You cannot walk.

How can I prevent migraines?

- Eat regular, healthy meals. Don't go too long without eating. Stay away from foods that seem to cause your headaches. Watch out for:
 - wine, ale, and beer
 - cheeses
 - aged, canned, cured, and processed meats
 - breads made with yeast
 - foods with cheese, chocolate, or nuts.
- Don't use medicines that trigger headaches. Ask your health care provider about this. You may need to stop using birth control or hormone pills.
- Don't smoke cigarettes.
- Get plenty of sleep every day.
- Lower your stress. Find time to relax, rest, and have fun in your life.
- Don't drive a car when you have a migraine.

See your health care provider if your headaches get worse or if they don't get better when you take medicine for them. It may take several visits to find the best way to control your headaches.

For more information, call or write: American Council for Headache Education (ACHE) 19 Mantua Mt. Royal, NJ 08061 800-255-ACHE (255-2243) 856-423-0258 Web site: <http://www.achenet.org> ►►

Educational materials, referrals to support groups National Headache Foundation 428 West St. James Place, 2nd Floor Chicago, IL 60657 800-843-2256 Web site: <http://www.headaches.org> ►► Educational materials, list of headache specialists, information specialists

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