

Migraine

Migraines are severe headaches, often felt on only one side of the head. They usually cause other symptoms as well as the head pain. Migraines can occur as often as several times a week or as seldom as once or twice a year. Medicines can help to relieve and prevent migraines.

There are two main types of migraine.

Migraine with aura (classic migraine)

– An aura occurs before or with ‘migraine with aura’. The aura may last up to an hour. Common aura symptoms include visual effects (e.g. seeing spots, flashing lights, zigzag lines, blurred vision), dizziness, numbness, pins and needles and effects to speech.

Migraine without aura (common migraine) – Most people who get migraines do not get an aura.

Signs and symptoms

Some people get warning signs (prodrome) up to 24 hours before a migraine starts. Warning signs include mood swings, changes in appetite, thirst, muscle aches and feeling sleepy.

A migraine headache can last from four hours to three days. Common symptoms include:

- moderate to severe pain
- throbbing
- pain on only one side of the head (it may affect both sides)
- nausea and vomiting
- being sensitive to light and noise
- pain worsens with movement or activity
- pain limits normal activities.

In children, migraines are often shorter lasting and the pain is often on both sides or in the middle of the head. Other symptoms (e.g. nausea, vomiting) can be more common than head pain.

Trigger factors

A tendency to get migraines can be inherited. Some people find certain things seem to trigger their migraines. Triggers are not the same for everyone and one person may have different triggers at different times.

Things that can trigger a migraine include:

- stress or relaxing after stress (e.g. weekend migraine)
- hormone changes (e.g. menstruation, pregnancy)
- glare, bright or flickering light
- strong smells or fumes
- weather, air pressure and altitude changes
- smoke, particularly from cigarettes
- dehydration
- alcohol
- caffeine withdrawal
- not enough sleep
- delaying or missing meals
- some foods and food additives (e.g. chocolate, citrus fruit, red wine, aged cheese, MSG)
- some medicines (e.g. oral contraceptives, overuse of pain relievers)
- strenuous exercise, including sex
- back and neck problems
- eye strain.

Relieving migraine

During a migraine it is best to rest in a quiet, dark room and avoid movement or activity. Medicines can help relieve a

migraine and work best if taken when the migraine starts. Once a migraine has developed, stomach emptying can slow down (called gastric stasis). When this happens, medicine (and food) can't easily pass from the stomach into the intestine to be absorbed. This means tablets and capsules (e.g. pain-relieving medicine) taken during a migraine may not work.

Ask a doctor or pharmacist for advice about medicines to relieve migraine. They include:

- simple non-prescription pain relievers (e.g. paracetamol, aspirin, ibuprofen, diclofenac, naproxen). Soluble tablets (dissolved in water) or 'rapid acting' tablets, are absorbed quickly and may give faster relief
- migraine-relieving medicines (e.g. eletriptan, naratriptan, rizatriptan, sumatriptan, zolmitriptan). These prescription medicines are available as tablets, wafers, nasal sprays and injections. They work best if taken when the head pain starts to develop
- anti-nausea medicines (e.g. metoclopramide, prochlorperazine). These medicines stop nausea and vomiting. They can also improve stomach emptying so that other medicines can be absorbed. A pharmacist can supply these medicines, without a prescription, for treatment of migraine.

Note: When medicines are used often to relieve migraine (more than 10–15 days a month) they can cause medication-overuse headaches.

Preventing migraine

- If you often have migraines, your doctor may prescribe a medicine that can prevent migraines. Medicines that prevent migraines need to be taken every day. They will not relieve a migraine once it has started.
- Some complementary therapies, physical therapies and lifestyle changes may help prevent migraine.

Self care

Things you can do to help manage migraine include:

- Keep a headache diary to identify the headache pattern, possible triggers and helpful treatments.
- Avoid things that trigger your migraine if possible.
- Work out a migraine management plan with your doctor. Know what to do when a migraine occurs.
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.
- Eat regular healthy meals, including plenty of fruits, vegetables and wholegrain foods. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises otherwise).
- Limit caffeine intake (e.g. tea, coffee, cola, energy drinks).
- Limit alcohol intake to no more than two standard drinks per day.

Important

A headache can be a symptom of a serious medical condition. Doctors and pharmacists can help identify the type and cause of a headache and advise on treatment. Seek medical advice if:

- a headache continues for longer than 3 days
- you have a sudden, severe or new type of headache
- headaches are severe, get worse or become more frequent
- aura symptoms do not disappear after headache stops
- headache occurs with confusion, drowsiness, vomiting, fever, stiff neck, rash, seizures, stroke-like symptoms
- headache wakes you at night
- headache occurs with eye pain or loss of sight
- headaches start after the age of 50
- headaches start after a head injury or an accident
- headaches start while on the oral contraceptive pill or HRT
- headache starts after exercise, sex, straining or coughing
- headaches occur more than 15 days in a month
- a child under 18 years has migraine symptoms.

Note: Children under 16 years should not be given aspirin, unless advised by a doctor.

- Don't smoke.
- Learn and use relaxation techniques to relax your mind and body.
- Get enough sleep.
- Wear sunglasses to reduce glare.
- Pay attention to your posture.
Take regular breaks if you work in the same position all day.

For more information

Headache Australia

Phone: 1300 886 660

Website: www.headacheaustralia.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthdirect.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on
CMI leaflets.

NPS Medicine Wise

Medicines Information Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26
from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts.

***Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.***

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