Learn About Migraine

Millions of American adults and children suffer from migraine. Consider these facts from the Migraine Research Foundation:

* Nearly one in four U.S. households include someone with migraine
* 90% of migraine sufferers have a family history of migraine
* 85% of chronic migraine sufferers are women

Whether you suffer from migraine yourself or you’re trying to support someone who does, learning the basics is a good place to start.

*What is a migraine?*

Migraine is more than just a headache. It is a medical condition characterized by throbbing or pulsing pain starting on one side of the head, often accompanied by symptoms that include nausea, vomiting, dizziness, extreme sensitivity to light, sound and touch. Although migraines are not life-threatening, they can and often do interfere with everyday functioning.

*How long does a migraine last?*

Migraines vary greatly in length and impact on daily life. Some last for hours and others for days. According to the International Headache Society, those who have fewer than 15 migraine days per month have episodic migraines, while those with chronic migraines have 15 or more per month.

*For e-version, add:* [Click here](https://medlineplus.gov/migraine.html#summary) to learn more about migraine.

*Are there different types?*

Although there is no typical migraine, there are two main classifications – with and without aura. The most common type is migraine without aura. According to the American Migraine Foundation, about 25% of people who experience migraine also experience an aura, which is a type of warning sign that a migraine is coming on. Sensory and visual changes with aura may include seeing flashing lights, black dots or zig zag lines.

*For e-version, add:* [Click here](https://americanmigrainefoundation.org/understanding-migraine/what-type-of-headache-do-you-have/) for more from the American Migraine Foundation about the different types of migraine.

*What causes migraine?*

Migraine is a condition that tends to run in families and is more common in women than men. Certain factors, often called triggers, can cause migraine to occur. Although these vary from person to person, the American Migraine Foundation identified these top 10 migraine triggers that occur most often:

1. Stress: Nearly 70% of people with migraine experience stress as a trigger
2. Changes in or an irregular sleep schedule
3. Hormones: Women are three times more likely to have migraine than men
4. Caffeine and alcohol
5. Changes in the weather
6. Diet
7. Dehydration (lack of fluids)
8. Light
9. Smell
10. Medication overuse

*For e-version, add:* [Click here](https://americanmigrainefoundation.org/resource-library/top-10-migraine-triggers-and-how-to-deal-with-them/) to learn more about migraine triggers and how to handle them.

*How is migraine diagnosed?*

Getting a proper diagnosis is a critical first step towards feeling better. Unfortunately, more than half of all people who have migraine are not diagnosed and those who do seek medical care are often misdiagnosed.

There is no one test to diagnose migraine. The doctor typically does a physical examination, headache history and tries to rule out other possible causes. It’s helpful to keep a migraine diary prior to a visit to the doctor, so a detailed history can be provided. Tests such as an MRI or CT scan will not diagnose migraine but could be used to rule out other possible causes for the pain.

*For e-version, add:* To prepare for your doctor visit, [click here](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/5005-migraine-headaches/diagnosis-and-tests) for examples of questions your doctor might ask.

*What is the cure for migraine?*

Migraine cannot be cured, so the main objective is to stop symptoms and prevent future episodes. Many sufferers can do this successfully by managing their lifestyle, and environment, including identifying factors that trigger an attack. Those with more frequent migraines may need preventive medications or medications to treat the symptoms, including headache pain. This decision should be made between the individual and their doctor after reviewing all available options.

*For e-version, add:* [Click here](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0080797/) for more information on migraine triggers, prevention strategies and different medications used to treat and prevent migraine.