

# Migraine Headaches

## General Information

A migraine is a disease that causes a severe headache. The intense pain is usually located on one side of your head. It can last a few hours or a few days. You can have a migraine once a week or once a year.

You may be unable to eat or keep your eyes open. You may have throbbing head pain, feel nausea or have to vomit. Bright light and noise make the migraine worse.

You may need to lie in a dark room and close your eyes. A migraine may force you to miss work and disrupt your quality of life.

There are two types of migraines: classic and common.

- Classic migraines start with warning signs: trouble seeing (blind spots, flashing light, vision loss or distortions of shapes and sizes) and seeing bright spots. You can have these warning signs for up to 30 minutes before the migraine starts.
- Common migraines do not have warning signs.

Migraines tend to run in families.

## Migraine Triggers

The exact cause of a migraine is not known. Doctors believe there are things that can cause a migraine. These triggers cause the blood vessels in your brain to overreact.

Triggers include:

- bright lights
- loud noises
- some foods and alcohol
  - chocolate
  - aged cheeses
  - MSG (monosodium glutamate)
  - onions
  - dairy products
  - meats with nitrate (such as hot dogs)
  - caffeine drinks or alcohol
- skipping meals
- stress, pressure and anger
- strong smells (such as perfume or smoke)
- sleep problems
- some medicines (birth control pills, pain medicines and prescription medicines). Talk with your health care provider about any prescription medicine that triggers a migraine. Do not stop taking the medicine on your own.

**(over)**

## When To Call Your Health Care Provider

A migraine is a real health concern but it is not dangerous. You can call your health care provider to see if there are medicines or lifestyle changes that will help your migraines.

You will need to see your health care provider for a bad headache that you don't think is a migraine. This could be a sign of a serious illness or injury.

You need to call your health care provider or 911 right away if you have a headache:

- that is sudden and severe
- that gets worse instead of better
- with memory loss, trouble speaking or seeing, strength loss, tingling or numb feelings in any part of your body or balance problems
- with fever, vision problems or personality changes for more than 60 minutes
- that lasts more than 1 week after you sustain a head injury.

## Lifestyle Changes You Can Make

If you are used to getting migraines, you can make some lifestyle changes. These include:

- try not to get stressed at work or home
- exercise
- don't sleep late on weekends
- don't get too tired
- eat at the same time each day
- don't skip meals
- don't eat or drink anything that triggers a migraine
- limit how much caffeine and pain medicines you use.

## Migraine Diary

You may want to write down information about your migraines. Keep a list of the following when the migraine started:

- the date and time
- where you were
- what you were doing
- how much stress you were under
- how you were sleeping
- if there were warning signs
- if there were any triggers (such as bright lights, strong odors, other medicine you took or what you ate)
- how intense the pain was (use a number scale with "1" being the mildest pain and "10" being the worst pain)
- what relieved your pain.

Bring your migraine diary with you when you visit your health care provider.