

## Neurosciences (Headache Disorders)

# Migraine

### What is the definition of migraine?

- A migraine is a headache, which usually causes moderate or severe pain. Migraine can appear as a throbbing pain, usually on one side of the head.
- There are many associated symptoms with migraine, such as feeling sick (nausea), vomiting, sensitivity to light (photophobia), sensitivity to noise and visual disturbances.
- Migraine is a common health condition, affecting around one in every five women and around one in every 15 men. They usually begin in early adulthood.

**There are many types of migraine which include;**

### Migraine with aura

- This type of migraine presents with a warning sign usually before the migraine grows. Examples of this are, flashing lights, zig zag lines, floaters.
- Other associated symptoms may be numbness, tingling and speech difficulty.

### Migraine without aura

- This type of migraine attack can last between 4 and 72 hours when untreated or unsuccessfully treated.
- It is the most common type in that 70%-90% of people experience this type of migraine attack.
- The headache is usually on one side of the head with a throbbing or pulsating pain and will worsen when you take every day exercise such as walking or climbing stairs.



## Patient Information

- Can affect activities of daily living
- During this type of migraine you will be likely to feel sick and may vomit or have diarrhoea.
- You may also experience sensitivity to light (photophobia) and/or sensitivity to sound (phonophobia)

### **Migraine aura without headache**

- Also referred to as silent migraine. This is where an aura or other migraine symptoms are experienced, but a headache does not develop.
- These types of episodes are still considered as migraine attacks however are characterised and diagnosed by other associated symptoms.

#### **This includes;**

- Flashing or shimmering light which is the most common visual symptom of migraine
- Seeing zigzag lines or waves, also called fortification illusions
- Seeing spots, floaters, circles, lines or other shapes and colors
- Blurring of vision
- Temporary loss of vision
- Tingling or numbness
- One-sided pain to the head

### **Migraine Triggers**

There are a number of factors that can provoke migraines and make them worse.

#### **These include;**

##### **Emotional**

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Tension
- Shock
- Depression
- Excitement

# Patient Information

## **Hormonal**

- Oestrogen levels going up and down
- Menstrual cycle

## **Diet**

- Missed, delayed or irregular meals
- Dehydration
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Foods such as chocolate, citrus fruits and dairy

## **Physical**

- Fatigue – being overtired
- Poor sleep patterns
- Lack of routine
- Shift work
- Poor posture
- Neck or shoulder tension
- Jet lag
- Low blood sugar (Hypoglycemia)
- Sudden change in exercise activity

## **Medication**

- Some sleeping tablets
- Combined contraceptive Pill
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)
- Medication overuse

## **Environmental**

- Fatigue – being overtired
- Bright lights
- Flickering screens
- Smoking

## Patient Information

- Loud noise
- Changes in climate
- Strong smells
- Change in atmosphere

### How can I manage my migraine?

- There are a variety of treatments available in order to treat and reduce symptoms of migraine.
- A health care professional will organise a consultation with you in order to assess and treat you in accordance to your symptoms.
- Migraine is a complicated condition which can vary between individuals therefore it may be that a change or combination of treatment will need to be explored in order to identify an effective management plan for you.

There are two management types in order to manage migraine and these are **Acute relief** and **Preventative medication**.

### Acute Relief

- Acute migraine treatments are designed to stop the migraine as soon as it occurs but will not prevent a further attack from happening.
- Health care professionals will possibly prescribe analgesics (pain relief) and/ or anti-emetics (anti-sickness drug) depending on individual need.
- When a migraine attack takes place, an adequate dose of acute relief medication should be taken. This will be recommended and prescribed by the healthcare professional.
- Providing the migraine attack is treated effectively with this treatment, if the migraine was to reoccur within the next 24 hours, the acute relief medication can be taken again.
- After three trials of acute medication, if two out of three attacks did not resolve with the treatment then you should contact the health professional so another type of medication can be tried.

### Preventative Medication

- Prophylactic migraine treatments are designed to lower the frequency of migraine attacks.
- This type of treatment should be taken daily and will not necessarily have any effect on your migraine attack when it happens, but providing the dose is taken correctly it will prevent the migraine attack from happening in the first place.
- You may be prescribed medication such as Beta-Blockers, Tricyclic Antidepressants, Anti-Epileptic Drugs and Antihistamines depending on individual need. These drugs are usually used to treat people with conditions such as high blood pressure, depression, epilepsy and common allergies. However there is increasing evidence to show that at the correct dose, these drugs can also lower the frequency of migraine attacks by having an effect on nerve signals, chemicals and blood vessels in the brain.

**Some preventative medication can take up to three months before becoming effective.**

### Lifestyle recommendations

#### The Six Golden Rules

- **Regular Meals.** Hypoglycaemia can trigger headaches. Eat 3 regular meals a day
- **Regular sleep-** Ensure you go to bed and wake up at regular times each day. Aim for 7-8 hours per night. (Avoid sleeping in at weekends)
- **Moderate exercise-** Avoid inconsistent patterns of exercise as this may trigger headaches. Moderate exercise three to five times each week will help to reduce stress and keep you physically fit.
- **Hydration-** Aim to drink between 2-3Litres of water per day. Avoid Citrus fruits as this can trigger headache
- **Avoid Caffeine-** Caffeine is a stimulant and withdrawal may cause headaches when blood levels of caffeine taper.
- **Stress-** May lead to an increase of headache. Relaxation and stress management may help reduce headaches.

It is important to manage your migraine effectively in order to prevent the occurrence of frequent daily headaches.

## Patient Information

In order to ensure correct management of your migraine, it is important to have a good knowledge base on your condition and understanding that improving your lifestyle and correct medication management can result in positive outcomes of pain control with minimal disruption of your quality of life.

### **Please complete a Headache Diary prior to attending your consultation**

### **Useful Information / Support networks**

**Dr A Thomas**                      Consultant Neurologist and Headache Specialist

**Colette Smith**                    Clinical Nurse Specialist in Headache Disorders  
**024 76967419**

**Sarah Flanagan**                 Secretary to Dr Thomas    **024 76965114**

**NHS Choices**                    <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/migraine>

**The Migraine Trust**            <http://www.migrainetrust.org>

**Migraine Action**               <http://www.migraine.org.uk>

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please ask contact **024 76967419** and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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