

HEADACHE (Migraine)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

4.4

DESCRIPTION

A migraine is an intense, incapacitating headache usually on one side of the head, and may be sometimes accompanied by other symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and visual problems. They may last up to 72 hours. Episodes of migraines can occur weekly in some people, while others may have less than one a year. Migraines affect both sexes, but are more common in females.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The nature of attacks varies between persons and from time to time in the same person. Symptoms of a classic migraine attack appear in the following sequence:

- An aura can precede the headache that may affect vision, hearing, or smell.
- The most common symptom is the inability to see clearly, followed by seeing bright spots and zigzag patterns. Visual disturbances may last several minutes or several hours, but they usually disappear once the headache begins.
- Dull, boring pain occurs in the temple and spreads to the entire side of the head. Pain becomes intense and throbbing.
- Nausea or vomiting may occur.
- In other types of migraine attack, the above symptoms (vision disturbances, headache, or vomiting) may be absent, or other symptoms may be present.

CAUSES

Some authorities feel that constriction, then dilation and inflammation of blood vessels of the scalp and brain may cause migraines. Headache begins when the blood vessels widen again. Attacks may be triggered by:

- Tension. (Emotional problems are probably the most common reason for migraine attacks, but headaches don't necessarily coincide with emotional upset. They often occur on weekends when stress is decreased.)
- Menstruation
- Use of contraceptives
- Fatigue
- Consumption of alcohol or certain foods
- Missing meals
- Excessive alcohol use
- Multiple other triggers

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Family history of migraines
- Smoking
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Use of many prescription and non-prescription drugs
- Sleep deprivation, or excess sleep for some
- Certain foods have been implicated, chocolate, alcohol, and specifically those foods containing tyramine. Such foods include pepperoni, red wine, chicken livers, active yeast preparations, and camembert, cheddar, and other aged cheeses.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Reduce stress in your life where possible. Some prescription drugs prevent attacks in some persons. Keep a headache diary so that you might identify those factors which trigger your headaches and avoid them.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Symptoms can be controlled with treatment. Pattern of symptoms and frequency of attacks can change over time. Reduction in severity and frequency may occur as you get older.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Rare status migraine (lasts over 72 hours).

GENERAL MEASURES

At the first sign of a migraine attack:

- Apply a cold cloth or ice pack to your head, or splash your face with cold water.
- Lie down in a quiet, dark room for several hours. Wedge pillows to support head. Relax and sleep if possible.
- Minimize noise, light and odors (especially cooking odors and tobacco smoke).
- Don't read or watch television.
- Avoid computer monitors and video games.
- Usually no diagnostic tests are required, however, laboratory blood studies or CT scan of the head may be performed only to rule out other disorders.

Student Health Center



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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.

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MEDICATION

Aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen or naproxen are available without prescription and are examples of medications that may be helpful for a migraine. No single drug is preferable. A wide variety of drugs can be prescribed for migraine symptoms and prevention as well. Medication to help control or prevent attacks is available only by prescription.

ACTIVITY

Rest during attacks. Between attacks, exercise to achieve maximum fitness. Do not drive or use dangerous machinery during an attack.

DIET

Because some attacks are caused by foods, such as cheese or chocolate, keep a record of what you ate before each attack. Avoid foods that seem to trigger migraine attacks. Otherwise, no special diet is necessary.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- You have a migraine attack that persists longer than 24 hours, despite treatment.
- You have frequent migraine attacks that interfere with normal life.
- If stress is a trigger for your headaches, you may want to make an appointment with a stress management counselor at the Wellness Center, (618)536-4441.

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