

Headache - migraines

Migraine is a type of headache and a recognised medical condition. Migraines can be experienced from as little as once or twice a year, or as often as two or three times a week. The pain is severe, throbbing and usually on one side of the head. A migraine attack can last from four hours to three days.

Migraine symptoms are different

A migraine headache has different symptoms to other types of headache. Some of the symptoms include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Sensitivity to light
- Sensitivity to sound
- Affected vision, such as an aura
- Sensitivity to smell and touch.

A combination of triggers

No one really knows what causes migraine. There is some evidence that migraine is an inherited condition. The medical community believes migraine attacks are almost certainly triggered by a combination of factors, such as:

- **Diet** - cheese, chocolate, citrus fruits, alcohol (especially red wine).
- **Sleep** - too little or too much.
- **Menstrual cycle** - migraine occurs two to three times more frequently in women than men.
- **Physiochemical** - excessive heat, light, noise or certain chemicals.
- **Emotional** - stress, excitement and fatigue.
- **Relaxation (weekend migraines)** - often triggered by a period of stress and overwork followed by relaxation.

There is no cure

Migraine is a complex condition because the exact causes are not known, which makes prevention difficult. However, there are treatments available to help reduce the number of attacks for migraine sufferers.

In the past pethidine was used to treat a migraine. This is no longer the best treatment. Pethidine is a highly addictive drug and there are now medications available which are far more effective than pethidine.

Type of help available

Migraines vary greatly from person to person and so does the treatment. There are four treatment options available to migraine sufferers:

- **Avoid the trigger factors** - this can be difficult, since migraines are often triggered by a combination of factors.
- **Drug treatment** - including pain killers and drugs to alter pressure on blood vessels.
- **Preventative treatment** - medication taken on a daily basis to reduce the number of attacks.

- **Non-drug therapies** - including acupuncture, biofeedback, goggles, hypnotherapy, exclusion diets, relaxation, yoga, meditation, herbal or homeopathic remedies.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Migraine Foundation Victoria Tel. (03) 9882 2203
- <http://www.headacheaustralia.org.au>]Headache Australia[Tel 1300 886 660

Things to remember

- Migraine is a type of headache and a recognised medical condition.
- Young female adults are most at risk.
- There is no cure, but the right treatment can reduce the number of attacks.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Brain Foundation Victoria

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