

PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

Migraines

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WHAT ARE MIGRAINES?

A migraine is a type of headache that affects roughly 12% of people in the United States (up to 6% of men and 17% of women).^{1,2} These severe headaches can happen alone or with other sensations that involve vision problems, numbness, or tingling that are called “auras.”¹ It is believed that migraines are caused by an overactivation of the trigeminal nerve (the pain-sensing nerve of the brain) due to an excess of neurotransmitters and vasodilation, but much is still unknown about them.^{1,3,4}

AM I AT RISK?

Adult women are three times more likely to have migraines than men.^{1,5} However, in children, boys are more commonly affected.⁵ Migraines usually start between 15-24 years, but they can happen at any age.⁶ If your parents had migraines, you are at an increased risk.⁵ Migraine risk decreases with age, especially after 60 years.⁵ Certain foods and medications may also increase your risk of having migraines.⁴ It is possible that your migraines are related to an unhealthy diet, lack of sleep, or inadequate exercise.³ Some women may experience migraines related to their menstrual cycle.^{1,3}

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Neck pain or stiffness
- Zigzag lines, flashes of lights, or blind spots in vision
- Sensitivity to lights or noises
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Confusion
- Throbbing headache on one side of the head
- Difficulty talking

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WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Speak with your doctor if you have migraine symptoms.³ There is no specific test for migraine, but your doctor might recommend a blood test or imaging to rule out other causes.³ Be prepared to describe your migraines and let your doctor know if any foods, flashing lights, or loud noises make them worse.³ Keep a record of how often your migraines happen and how bad they are on a scale of 1-10.^{1,3} Your doctor may recommend keeping track of all the foods you eat to see if they are causing your migraines.⁴

TREATMENT OPTIONS

You may also be able to stop your migraines from happening or prevent them from hurting as much if you exercise 4 to 5 times per week, work on decreasing stress, and get enough sleep.^{1,4,5} It is also important that you drink enough water during the day. If these things do not help your migraines, osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT), medications, or a combination of both may be recommended by your doctor. OMT techniques such as myofascial tissue release and suboccipital inhibition, among others, have been shown to help patients who experience migraines. Medications used for migraine treatment can either help prevent them from occurring (preventive medications) or help stop them once they start (abortive medications). Your doctor may recommend either or both types so that your migraines are better controlled. The treatment types that your doctor recommends may be tailored based on the severity and frequency of your migraines.

PROGNOSIS

The prognosis of migraine headaches can vary from complete remission to progressive worsening of symptoms and chronic migraines. Migraines tend to be most severe during early to middle adulthood and eventually become milder with aging. However, chronic migraines can last throughout life with variable frequency and severity.^{1,2}

SOURCE(S):

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