

Migraines

Most people who get migraine headaches will tell you they are painful and can even be debilitating. Some who suffer from the intense throbbing or constant ache find relief by resting in a dark room with a cold compress over their forehead. Others find that a scalp massage or putting pressure on the temples can help lessen discomfort. Fortunately, medications also are available to help relieve pain if symptoms have already started and preventive medications can be taken on a regular basis to reduce the severity or frequency of migraines.

Migraines can last anywhere from a few hours to several days. Some people have migraines several times a month, while others have them less frequently. There are two types of migraines. Classic migraines usually start with some type of visual disturbance called an aura, such as flashes of light, zig-zag lines or blind spots. Common migraines do not begin with an aura. Instead, they tend to start more slowly but can last longer and interfere with daily activities.

While migraines sometimes run in families, women are three times more likely to suffer this type of headache than men. Symptoms of migraines can include:

- Moderate to intense pain on one or both sides of the head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Blurred vision or blind spots
- Sensitivity to light, sound or odors
- Fatigue or light-headedness
- Stiff neck or tender scalp

Some people may have a feeling that they are going to get a migraine before it happens. These “premonitions” may include intense energy, food cravings, mood changes, fatigue, thirst or drowsiness.

Different people will have different triggers that can cause or worsen a headache. Those who suffer from migraines should be aware of those factors that can start a headache and try to avoid them if possible. Triggers may include:

- Stress and anxiety
- Certain foods, including chocolate, aged cheeses, and processed or salty foods
- Hormonal changes in women
- Changes in the weather, altitude or sleeping patterns
- Skipped meals or fasting
- Intense physical activity
- Strong odors, bright lights or loud noises
- Certain medications

Nonprescription medications such as aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen, naproxen or ketoprofen can help relieve migraine headaches. More severe pain may require prescription medications. People who experience migraines more than twice a month

may benefit from taking daily medications to reduce the frequency, severity and length of future migraines. Check with your doctor if your medications stop relieving pain and start causing headaches. These rebound headaches can occur if over-the-counter or prescription headache medications are taken in high doses or for more than nine days per month.

In addition to medications, you can make certain lifestyle changes to help ease migraine pain. Don't drink alcohol or smoke. Watch what you eat and exercise regularly. Get plenty of sleep and stay relaxed. Avoid triggers that you know can cause a migraine. For more information about migraine headaches, talk with your doctor or visit the American Academy of Family Physicians Web site at www.familydoctor.org.