



Migraine

What is Migraine?

A migraine is a headache, which typically affects one side of the head. The pain can vary from a dull ache to severe throbbing and can last between four hours and three days. There may be nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting and the pain may be worsened by light or sound. The headache may start with a visual disturbance (aura) such as flashing lights, zigzags and breaking-up of vision. Check to see if both eyes are affected by covering one eye at a time. This usually lasts between 5 and 50 minutes. In severe cases, there may be numbness and tingling in the hands, face, lips or tongue. When the headache has gone there is often a feeling of weariness and exhaustion, which may persist for a day or two.

When you should visit your GP:

- If you develop a new kind of headache or pattern of headache that you have not had before.
- If your headache comes on suddenly, especially with a stiff neck, vomiting or rash.
- If your headache is linked with a stiff neck or fever
- When the pain is too severe for painkillers available over the counter to help.
- If the frequency or length of your headaches increases.
- If any of the following symptoms occur and the cause is not known:
 - Sight or balance affected
 - Faintness or loss of consciousness
 - Loss of appetite leading to weight loss
 - Weakness on one side of the face or body.
- If the headaches are making you depressed.
- If the headaches started after beginning a new type of medicine.
- If your headaches are worrying your family or friends.

Typical causes of migraine:

- Foods that may trigger an attack:
Alcohol (particularly red wine); cheese (dairy products); fried food; chocolate; citrus fruits; tea; coffee; seafood; broad beans; caffeine.

Try to exclude one type of food for a month to see if there is any reduction in frequency or severity of the attacks.

- Menstrual cycle
Attacks in women who suffer from migraine occur on the first day of their period in 10% of cases. Women who menstruate are three times more likely to suffer from migraine than men.
15% of girls have their first migraine in the same year as their first period.
- Over-exertion; stress; smells; weather changes; flashing / flickering lights

Solving migraine.

Keep a diary and make a note of the following:

- Headaches - position; time of start; length; severity.
- Activities and food (particularly in the last 24 hours before an attack)
- The time and amount of alcohol drunk
- Time of bedtime and waking
- Menstrual cycle
- Stress (emotional and physical).
- Medicines, (your GP will want to know what painkillers you have tried).
- Anything else you suspect may trigger your migraines.

Don't go hungry - eat a good breakfast, and avoid very high or low temperatures and bright lights. If your migraines are frequent and seem to be caused by fluorescent lights, it may be worthwhile booking an appointment for a colorimetry assessment. This is a method of finding a specific coloured tint for glasses, which may reduce the number or severity of headaches and migraines.

When you have a migraine:

Take your most effective painkiller as soon as you are sure you are starting a migraine (they work better when taken early). If taken with fizzy water or lemonade they may work faster. Do not take more than 30 painkillers a month because they may actually cause headaches if used too often.

Try to sleep in a darkened room to get over the attack. If you have children who need looking after, it may be better to sleep in the same room as them, rather than lying in a different room and worrying about what they are doing.

- Massage can help during the migraine.
- Osteopathy and other physical therapy can ease muscle tension, reduce stress and may help to relieve migraine.
- Try hot or cold compresses against the site of pain. Thermo packs for freezer or microwave are available from chemists. Cold compresses are thought best for stress-related and tension headaches, while a hot compress may be effective for headaches caused by muscle strain and tiredness.