

Neurology

Migraine

Definition of migraine:

- Migraine is a type of headache that usually causes moderate to severe pain. Migraine is often described as a throbbing pain, usually on one side of the head.
- There are many associated symptoms with migraine, such as feeling sick (nausea), being sick (vomiting), sensitivity to light (photophobia), sensitivity to noise and visual disturbances.
- Migraine is a common health condition, affecting around 1 in every 5 women and around 1 in every 15 men. They usually begin in early adulthood.

There are many types of migraine which include:

Migraine with aura

- This type of migraine is often preceded by a warning sign or “aura,” which appears before the headache develops. Common auras include flashing lights, zig zag lines or floaters in vision.
- Additional symptoms may include numbness, tingling sensations and difficulty with speech.

Migraine without aura

- This type of migraine attack can last between 4 and 72 hours if left untreated or if treatment is ineffective.
- It is the most common form of migraine, affecting between 70 and 90 out of every 100 people who experience migraine.
- The headache is usually on one side of the head and presents as



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throbbing or pulsating pain and will worsen with everyday activities like walking or climbing stairs.

- It can affect activities of daily living.
- During this type of migraine, you may feel sick and may vomit or have diarrhoea.
- You may also experience sensitivity to light (photophobia) and/or sensitivity to sound (phonophobia)

Migraine aura without headache

- Also known as a silent migraine. This is where an aura or other migraine symptoms are experienced, but a headache does not develop.
- Although a headache doesn't happen, these episodes are still considered as migraine attacks and are diagnosed by other associated symptoms.

Common symptoms include:

- Flashing or shimmering light which is the most common visual symptom of migraine
- Seeing zigzag lines or waves, also called fortification illusions
- Seeing spots, floaters, circles, lines or other shapes and colors in vision
- Blurred vision
- Temporary loss of vision
- Tingling or numbness
- One-sided head pain

Migraine triggers

There are a number of factors that can provoke migraines and make them worse. Common triggers include:

Emotional factors

- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| • Stress | • Shock |
| • Anxiety | • Depression |
| • Tension | • Excitement |

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Hormonal factors

- Oestrogen levels going up and down
- Menstrual cycle changes

Dietary factors

- Missed, delayed or irregular meals
- Foods such as chocolate, citrus fruits and dairy
- Dehydration
- Alcohol
- Caffeine

Physical factors

- Fatigue or being overtired
- Poor sleep patterns
- Lack of routine
- Shift work
- Poor posture
- Neck or shoulder tension
- Jet lag
- Low blood sugar (Hypoglycemia)
- Sudden changes in physical activity

Medication

- Some sleeping tablets
- Combined contraceptive Pill
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)
- Medication overuse

Environmental factors

- Bright lights



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- Flickering screens
- Smoking
- Loud noise
- Climate changes
- Strong smells
- Change in atmosphere

Managing your migraine

- A variety of treatments are available to help manage and reduce symptoms of migraine.
- A health care professional will arrange a consultation to assess your symptoms and create a treatment plan tailored to your need.
- Migraine is a complicated condition which can vary between individuals, so finding the most effective management plan may involve trying different treatments or combinations of treatments.

Types of migraine management

There are two main types of management: **Acute relief** and **Preventative medication**.

Acute relief

- Acute treatments are designed to stop a migraine as soon as it starts but do not prevent further attacks.
- Healthcare professionals will prescribe analgesics (pain relief) and/or anti-emetics (anti-sickness medicine) based on individual needs.
- It's important to take an adequate dose of the prescribed acute relief medication as soon as a migraine begins. This specific dose will be recommended by your healthcare professional.
- If another migraine happens within 24 hours, the acute relief medication can be taken again, provided it was effective in managing the initial attack.
- If after 3 trials, at least 2 out of 3 attacks don't resolve with this medication, contact your healthcare professional so another type of medication can be tried.

Preventative Medication

- Preventive migraine treatments aim to reduce the frequency of migraine attacks.
- These medicines should be taken daily and will not have an immediate effect on a current migraine attack. However, if the dose is taken as prescribed, they help to prevent future migraines from happening.
- You may be prescribed medication such as Beta-Blockers, Tricyclic Antidepressants, Anti-Epileptic Drugs and Antihistamines, depending on your specific needs. These medicines are usually used to treat conditions like high blood pressure, depression, epilepsy and common allergies. However, there is growing evidence that, when taken at the correct dose, they can also help lower the frequency of migraines by having an effect on nerve signals, chemicals and blood vessels in the brain.
- **Some preventative medication can take up to 3 months before becoming effective.**

Lifestyle recommendations: The 6 golden rules

1. **Regular Meals.** Hypoglycaemia can trigger headaches, so aim to eat 3 regular meals a day.
2. **Regular sleep:** Make sure you go to bed and wake up at regular times each day. Aim for 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night. Avoid sleeping in on weekends.
3. **Moderate exercise:** Avoid irregular exercise routines, as this can trigger headaches. Moderate exercise 3 to 5 times a week can help to reduce stress and keep you physically fit.
4. **Hydration:** Aim to drink between 2 to 3 litres of water per day. Avoid citrus fruits, as this can trigger headaches.
5. **Avoid Caffeine:** Caffeine is a stimulant and withdrawal can cause headaches as blood levels of caffeine drop.
6. **Stress management:** Stress can increase headache frequency. Relaxation techniques and stress management practices can help reduce headaches.

It is important to manage your migraine effectively in order to prevent the occurrence of frequent daily headaches. To ensure proper management, it's important to understand your condition and how making lifestyle

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changes, combined with the right medication, can lead to better pain control and minimize disruption to your quality of life.

Please complete a Headache Diary before attending your consultation

Useful Information / Support networks

Dr A Thomas	Consultant Neurologist and Headache Specialist
Colette Smith	Clinical Nurse Specialist in Headache Disorders 024 7696 7419
Chelsea Baldwin	Secretary to Dr Thomas 024 7696 5114
Whitney Thomson	Secretary to Headache Disorder CNS 024 7696 5294
NHS Choices	www.nhs.uk/conditions/migraine
The Migraine Trust	www.migrainetrust.org
Migraine Action	www.migraine.org.uk

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