

# Overview

## Migraine

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Migraine is a common condition that affects your brain and nervous system.

The main symptom is a severe headache on 1 side of your head. There are things you can do to manage the symptoms of migraine.

## Check if it's migraine

The most common symptom of a migraine attack is moderate or severe headache. The headache feels like throbbing pain on 1 side of your head.

► [What we mean by severe pain](#)

You may have other symptoms before or after the headache, such as:

- feeling sick (nausea) or vomiting
- sensitivity to movement, light, sound or smell

Other symptoms can depend on the type of migraine, such as:

- migraine without aura - an intense headache but no warning signs
- migraine with aura - includes warning signs before the attack such as seeing flashing lights
- silent migraine - aura or other migraine symptoms but no headache

The symptoms can appear in stages.

[Symptoms and stages of migraine](#)

## Contact your GP if you have:

- severe migraine symptoms that do not improve with painkillers you can buy without a prescription
- more than 5 migraine attacks in a month

## Call 112 or 999 and ask for an ambulance if

you or someone else has:

- paralysis or weakness in 1 or both arms, or 1 side of the face
- slurred or garbled speech
- a sudden, very painful headache unlike anything you had before
- headache with a high temperature (fever), stiff neck, confusion, seizures, double vision and a rash

These symptoms may be a sign of a more serious condition.

## What happens at your appointment

Your GP may do a physical examination and ask you:

- about your symptoms and when they happen
- if other people in your family have migraine
- to keep a diary of your symptoms

### [Diagnosing migraine](#)

## Treating migraine

There is no cure for migraine. But treatment can help to reduce the symptoms.

Medicines include:

- painkillers - including medicines you can buy without a prescription, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen
- triptans - these help reverse changes in the brain linked to migraine
- anti-sickness medicines (anti-emetics) - to relieve feeling sick (nausea) or vomiting

Try not to use the maximum dosage of painkillers more than 2 days a week. This could make it harder to treat headaches over time.

During a migraine attack, it may help to:

- sleep or lie in a dark room
- drink enough water
- use cold packs or heat packs

### [Migraine treatment and prevention](#)

## Preventing migraine attacks

To help prevent migraine attacks:

- avoid any triggers you can identify
- stick to a sleep routine - [tips for sleep problems](#)
- [eat a healthy, balanced diet](#) and do not skip meals
- [be active](#)
- stay hydrated
- limit your intake of caffeine and alcohol

Your GP may also prescribe medicines, such as:

- anti-seizure medicine (topiramate)
- high blood pressure medicine (propranolol)

It may take several weeks before symptoms improve.

## Causes of migraine

Migraine is a common condition. It affects around 1 in 5 women and around 1 in 15 men. It usually begins in early adulthood.

We do not know the exact causes of migraine, but they may include:

- temporary changes in the chemicals, nerves and blood vessels in the brain
- your genes - around half of people who have migraine have a close relative with the condition

Some people with migraine find certain things can trigger a migraine attack. For example, stress.

### [Causes of migraine and common triggers](#)

## Outlook for migraine

Migraine can affect your quality of life. Migraine attacks can stop you doing everyday activities. Some people find they need to stay in bed for days.

Some people have attacks often. Other people only have an attack sometimes. It's possible for years to pass between migraine attacks.

Migraine attacks can sometimes get worse over time. But most people find they improve over many years.

## Complications of migraine

People with migraine may be more at risk of ischaemic strokes or mental health difficulties. But the risk is small.

[Complications of migraine](#)

## Migraine and stigma

Stigma happens when there are negative beliefs about migraine. You may worry about stigma or experience stigma from other people.

This could be that people:

- do not understand your symptoms
- think that migraine is "just a headache"
- judge you if you take days off or avoid activities

Stigma can lead to isolation or unfair treatment at work, school, or in the healthcare system. It can cause stress and make it hard to manage your triggers. You may also feel the need to hide your symptoms or condition.

[Talking therapies](#) can help with stress or anxiety related to migraine.

You are not alone in experiencing stigma. If you feel isolated or unable to cope, it is important to get support.

## Support for migraine

There are organisations that offer advice and support for people with migraine:

- [Migraine Association of Ireland - migraine.ie](#)
- [Working with a disability - citizensinformation.ie](#)

[The Drugs Payment Scheme](#) can help if you or your family pay more than €80 a month for approved medicines.

## Living Well programme

Living Well is a free self-management programme for people with a long-term health condition. It provides workshops and resources to help you manage your condition better.

[The Living Well programme](#)

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