

Migraine

A migraine usually feels like a very bad headache with a throbbing pain on 1 side. It's common and there are things you can try to help.

Check if it's a migraine

A migraine tends to be a very bad headache with a throbbing pain on 1 side of the head.

You may get other symptoms just before a migraine, such as:

- feeling very tired and yawning a lot
- craving certain foods or feeling thirsty
- changes in your mood
- a stiff neck
- peeing more

You may also get warning signs you're about to have a migraine (called an aura), such as:

- problems with your sight, such as seeing zigzag lines or flashing lights
- numbness or a tingling that feels like pins and needles
- feeling dizzy
- difficulty speaking

Aura symptoms should not last for longer than an hour.

There are different types of migraine with different symptoms.

Types of migraine

Symptoms	Migraine type
No warning signs	Migraine without aura
Warning signs like seeing zigzag lines, numbness or tingling, feeling dizzy or difficulty speaking just before the migraine starts	Migraine with aura
Symptoms like flashing lights, but no headache	Migraine aura without headache (silent migraine)

Migraines usually last between 2 hours and 3 days, with some symptoms (such as feeling very tired) starting up to 2 days before the head pain starts and finishing after the headache stops.

Some people have migraines several times a week, while others do not have them very often.

It's common to have migraines before or during your period, called menstrual migraines.

Most people find their migraines slowly get better as they get older.

See a GP if:

- your migraines are severe or getting worse, or lasting longer than usual
- you have migraines more than once a week
- you're finding it difficult to control your migraines
- you regularly get migraines before or during your period

▼ What we mean by severe pain

Severe pain:

- always there and so bad it's hard to think or talk
- you cannot sleep
- it's very hard to move, get out of bed, go to the bathroom, wash or dress

Moderate pain:

- always there
- makes it hard to concentrate or sleep
- you can manage to get up, wash or dress

Mild pain:

- comes and goes
- is annoying but does not stop you doing daily activities

Ask for an urgent GP appointment or get help from NHS 111 if:

You have a migraine and:

- it's lasted longer than 72 hours
- aura symptoms last longer than an hour at a time
- you're pregnant or just had a baby

You can call 111 or get help from 111 online (Link: <https://111.nhs.uk/triage/check-your-symptoms/>).

Call 999 if you or your child:

- have a headache that came on suddenly and is extremely painful
- have problems speaking or remembering things
- lose your vision or have blurred or double vision
- feel drowsy or confused
- have a seizure or fit
- have a very high temperature and symptoms of meningitis (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/meningitis/symptoms/)
- cannot move or have weakness in the arms or legs on 1 side of your body, or 1 side of your face

Do not drive yourself to A&E.

The person you speak to at 999 will give you advice about what to do.

Treatment for migraines

Migraine treatments include:

- painkillers such as ibuprofen and paracetamol
- medicines called triptans
- medicines that stop you feeling sick or being sick

You may have to try a combination of medicines before you find something that works.

A GP may also recommend making changes to your lifestyle to help manage your migraines, such as eating at regular times and drinking less caffeine.

If your migraines are severe, you might be offered other things to help, such as learning relaxation techniques and acupuncture.

If these treatments do not manage your migraines, you may be offered a new type of medicine called a gepant. These work in a different way than other migraine medicines, so may be of more use to you.

The Migraine Trust has more information on gepants (Link: <https://migrainetrust.org/live-with-migraine/healthcare/treatments/gepants/>)

If none of these treatments help your symptoms, or they're getting worse, you may be referred to a specialist for further tests and treatment.

Important

Try not to take high doses of painkillers too often as this could make it harder to treat your migraines.

Causes of migraines

It's not known what causes migraines.

You're more likely to get them if you have a close family member who gets them.

Some people find certain triggers can cause migraines, such as:

- starting their period
- anxiety and depression
- stress and tiredness
- not eating regularly or skipping meals
- too much caffeine
- not getting enough exercise

It can help to keep a migraine diary to help you work out what might trigger your migraines.

The Migraine Trust has advice about what to record in a headache diary (Link: <https://migrainetrust.org/live-with-migraine/self-management/keeping-a-migraine-diary/>)

Things you can do to ease or reduce migraines

There are things you can do yourself to manage your migraines, with help and advice from a GP.

Do

- ✓ try sleeping or lying down in a darkened room during a migraine
- ✓ try to avoid things you know trigger your migraines, such as certain foods
- ✓ stay well hydrated and limit how much caffeine and alcohol you drink
- ✓ try to keep to a healthy weight
- ✓ eat meals at regular times
- ✓ get regular exercise
- ✓ get plenty of sleep
- ✓ try to manage your stress

Find out more

- The Migraine Trust: about migraine (Link: <https://migrainetrust.org/understand-migraine/>)

Migraine

Migraines affect 6 million people in the UK. Identifying and avoiding the things that trigger migraines is an important part of managing them, says Dr Dawn Harper.



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