

Migraines and Headaches

Josette Heaton, AS, Clerical Specialist



A headache is defined as a pain in the head, and a migraine is defined as a headache of varying intensity, often accompanied by nausea and/or sensitivity to light and sound. Headaches can be cured using general over the counter medication; however, a migraine is not that simple. **Migraine headaches are a type of headache that involve complex neurological symptoms. They can present in many ways, and can have different causes (triggers), and vary by degrees of severity. Trigger means to cause (an event or situation) to happen or exist.**

According to the American Migraine Foundation, “Migraine is not just a bad headache. It’s a disabling neurological disease with different symptoms and different treatment approaches compared to other headache disorders.”

Not everyone who has a migraine is affected the same way, nor do they have the same triggers. Migraines can be debilitating, can affect your day-to-day activities, and can prevent you from fully enjoying life. Pain from a migraine can be present in the eyes, cheeks, sides of head either one side or both sides, as well as the front of the head, back of head, or both. The pain can be moderate, severe, or crippling and can be accompanied by any one or more of the following: nausea, vomiting, light sensitivity, noise sensitivity, and a sensitivity to smells. The pain can often be described as a throbbing pulsating feeling or as I like to describe it “the sound of my heart beating in my head.”

A migraine can present with auras, like seeing bright lights fluttering all over, dark spots, or lights in the form of shapes that appear as halos around everything, or that “uninviting” brightness nothing can help. It can cause blurred vision and/or loss of vision and typically occurs before the onset of the pain of a migraine attack; those may last for hours or less. Some people may experience numbness, tingling, dizziness, and/or difficulty speaking.

There is no definitive cause of migraines, however genetics and environmental factors are believed to play a role, they affect both men and women; however, women are more likely to suffer from migraines due to hormonal triggers as well as stress, weather, and environmental changes.

“The American Migraine Foundation estimates that at least 39 million Americans live with migraine, but because many people do not get a diagnosis or the treatment they need, the actual number is probably higher.”

Migraines are classified as episodic or chronic, and generally present in four distinct phases. You can follow up on those classifications, and phases by reading the article “What is a Migraine” published by the American Migraine Foundation on their website: <https://americanmigrainefoundation.org>. Excerpts listed in this article will also be found at the afore mentioned website.

I personally have suffered migraines since before my teenage years, though not diagnosed until I was in my late 20’s, due to a lack of insurance and proper healthcare. Before being diagnosed, I had experienced bouts of numbness/tingling in my arms, mouth, lips, and face, and dizziness and blackness, as well as bouts of speaking gibberish; though I knew what I wanted to say, I was unable to form audible words, those symptoms would accompany my headaches. It was and is very concerning and scary to experience those symptoms, not only for the person experiencing them but also for family or friends who witness them.

Over the years, and with the direction of a neurologist, I have learned how to medicate and prepare for when those symptoms arise; I learned to take my preventive migraine medication as prescribed, as well as my acute medication for when a migraine strikes. If those do not work, I must lie down if possible, and have complete darkness with complete silence.

It is my opinion that if you experience any of the symptoms listed above or believe that you are experiencing migraines to seek assistance from a medical professional. Your family doctor can also refer you to a neurologist, to begin your journey to managing your migraines.