



# MIGRAINE

Migraine is a severe headache often felt on one side of the head. About half of the people who get migraine have a close family member also affected by it. Migraine can occur more than once a week or as little as once or twice a year. Headaches that occur every day are generally not migraines.

During a migraine, blood vessels in the head swell and the nerves around them become very sensitive, sending pain messages to the brain. As blood flows through the vessels, each pulse produces the throbbing pain of migraine.

Migraines are different from other headaches (see *Headache* Fact Card). Many people get warnings up to 24 hours before a migraine starts. These warnings may include mood swings, not wanting to eat, feeling sleepy, depressed or irritable, craving for sweet food or yawning a lot.

There are two main types of migraine.

## Migraine with aura

For up to an hour before your headache starts, you may have aura symptoms such as:

- Flashing lights in front of your eyes.
- Blurred vision, blind spots.
- Seeing wavy lines that move.
- A numb and/or tingling feeling ('pins and needles') in one arm or one side of your face.

## Migraine without aura

About 80% of migraine attacks do not have an aura.

## Signs and symptoms

Once the migraine starts, common symptoms include:

- Pain, often only on one side of the head.
- Head throbs with each pulse.
- Feeling sick and/or vomiting.
- Wanting to get away from light, noise, people and strong smells.
- A pale face.
- Headache gets worse if you move or exercise.
- Feeling weak and washed out or happy and relaxed after the headache has gone.

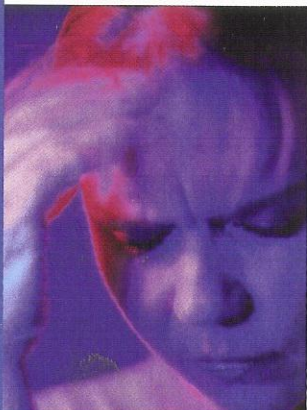
## Trigger factors

Some people find certain things seem to start (trigger) their migraine. Triggers are not the same for everyone and they may be different for the same person at different times.

## Important

See your doctor if:

- You have a sudden, severe headache for the first time.
- Your headaches get worse or become more frequent.
- Your headache starts after exercise, sex, straining or coughing.
- You get sleepy, confused, have trouble remembering things, lose your balance, or your vision changes with your headache.
- You have a fever, joint and muscle pains or a stiff neck with your headache.
- You have pain in your eyes or loss of sight with your headache (see *Glaucoma* Fact Card)
- Your headaches start after the age of 50 or after a head injury.
- The aura does not disappear after your headache goes away.



Common triggers include:

- Stress, tension.
- Hormone changes (e.g. menstrual periods, pregnancy, menopause, oral contraceptives, hormone replacement therapy).
- Bright or flickering light, strong smells or fumes, weather and altitude changes, heat and cold.
- Delaying or missing meals, fasting.
- Alcohol.
- Too much or not enough sleep.
- Certain medicines (ask a pharmacist).
- Strenuous exercise, including sex.

Some people find they get a migraine after eating certain foods, however foods are not usually the main trigger for migraine.

## Medicines

### Relieving migraine

Depending on what symptoms you have, there are medicines to:

- Relieve the pain while the migraine runs its course (ask a pharmacist).
- Relieve the pain and terminate the migraine (ask a doctor).
- Stop nausea and vomiting.
- Shrink the blood vessels in the head back to their normal size.

Because these medicines work in different ways, you need to take them at specific times to get the best relief. (Talk to a doctor and pharmacist).

### Preventing migraine

- If you have two or more migraines a month or they affect your lifestyle too much, there are prescription medicines that may help prevent or decrease the number of migraines you get (talk to a doctor).
- These medicines need to be taken every day to get the best results.
- Medicines that help prevent migraines will not relieve a migraine once it has started.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist



KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN  
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The information in this card was current at time of printing.

## Self care

- Find out what things trigger migraine and avoid them if possible.
- Keep a record of activities and migraines.
- Work out a treatment plan with a doctor and pharmacist. Know what to do when a migraine occurs.
- Keep adequate supplies of medicine on hand as they are most effective if used early in the migraine.
- Learn to relax (see *Relaxation Techniques* Fact Card).
- Plan ahead, rearrange activities to ease stress.
- Eat regular and healthy meals (see *Nutrition* series of fact cards).
- Get regular sleep (see *Sleeping Problems* Fact Card).
- Do not drive or use machinery during a migraine or when using some migraine medicines (ask a pharmacist).

## Recommended reading

Lance, James W.  
*Migraine and Other Headaches*  
Simon & Schuster, 1999 ISBN 0684868466

## Other relevant fact cards

- *Headache*
- *Glaucoma*
- *Sleeping Problems*
- *Nutrition* series
- *Relaxation Techniques*

## Contact

**The Brain Foundation** at [www.brainaustralia.org.au](http://www.brainaustralia.org.au)

**The headache and migraine information site** at [www.headache.com.au](http://www.headache.com.au)

**A Self Care pharmacy** – to locate telephone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

In case of poisoning, phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

