

Understanding migraine headaches

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June is Migraine and Headache Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn more about migraines.

Migraine headaches can cause severe throbbing pain or a pulsing sensation, usually on one side of the head, often accompanied by nausea, vomiting and extreme sensitivity to light and sound. A migraine usually lasts from four to 72 hours, if untreated. Migraines might occur rarely or strike several times a month, and the pain can be so severe that it interferes with your daily activities.

Migraine is three times more common in women than in men, and it affects more than 10% of people worldwide, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Migraines can begin at any age, though they often first occur during adolescence.

For some people, a warning symptom known as an aura occurs before or with the [headache](#). An aura can include [visual disturbances](#), such as flashes of light or blind spots, or other disturbances, such as tingling on one side of the face, or in an arm or leg, and difficulty speaking. A migraine aura also can occur without an associated headache.

The term "ocular migraine" often is used interchangeably to refer to two different conditions: Migraine aura that involves visual disturbance, which usually isn't serious, and retinal migraine, which could signal something serious and warrants prompt medical attention. A retinal migraine is a rare condition occurring in a person who has experienced other symptoms of migraine. Retinal [migraine](#) involves repeated bouts of short-lasting, diminished vision or blindness. These bouts may precede or accompany a headache.

Migraine triggers can include [hormonal changes](#) in women; stress; sleep changes; and certain foods, food additives and medications. Some people who have migraines appear to be more sensitive to changes in the weather, including bright sunlight, extreme heat or cold, barometric pressure changes, and windy or stormy weather.

There may be a link between migraines and the gut. Research suggests that people with frequent headaches may be more likely to develop gastrointestinal disorders. And research has shown that people who regularly experience gastrointestinal symptoms, such as reflux, diarrhea, constipation and nausea, have a higher prevalence of headaches than those who don't have gastrointestinal symptoms.

Living with migraines can be a daily challenge. Medication is a proven way to both treat and prevent migraines, but medication is only part of the story. It's also important to take good care of yourself, including diet, exercise and stress management. Learn more about how combining medication with behavioral measures and lifestyle can be the most effective way to handle migraines.

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