

# Migraines

## Migraines can be debilitating

Migraines occur on a spectrum of mild to very severe headaches. They are diagnosed by a characteristic pattern, your past history and a family history of migraines.

Migraines can last from a few hours up to days.

Women get migraines more than men and they affect 1 in 10 people overall. Frequency and severity will decrease with age.

Migraines do not usually indicate more serious underlying illness.

## Why do I get migraines?

What causes migraines is not fully understood but it is related to changes in blood vessels. Doctors may refer to them as vascular headaches.

A number of chemicals or triggers can cause these blood vessel changes. Some possible triggers for your migraine include:

- Alcohol, particularly red wine
- Chocolate, coffee, cheese, some food preservatives
- Starvation
- Volatile agents such as petrol, body sprays, cleaning fluids
- Exercise, excitement, relaxation or fatigue
- Hormones, periods or menopause
- Medication
- Environmental triggers such as bright or flickering lights, noise, televisions, computers

They often have a pattern and can occur sporadically or frequently. They can be very debilitating for some people. A precipitant is not always found or known.

## What are the symptoms?

Migraine pain typically starts on one side or the other and can spread over the whole head. It is usually worse with movement. Associated symptoms such as nausea, sensitivity to bright lights and noise are common.

The pain has a throbbing nature and your head may feel tight or squeezed. It is usually worse with movement.

A number of people get an aura or sensations before the headache including:

- Shimmering lights
- Blurred vision
- Numbness or tingling
- Strange smells
- Nausea or vomiting

## In the hospital

If this is your first migraine or your treatment at home has failed, various strategies will be tried by your doctor. As a rule, starting treatment as early as possible with your medications is the key.

If your symptoms are mild and/or early then you may be given simple painkillers such as aspirin, nurofen and paracetamol plus anti nausea medications such as maxolon. If you have a drug allergy you must tell your doctor or nurse immediately.

Stronger treatments used in the hospital involve various medications and intravenous fluids. Largactil (chlorpromazine) has been shown to be most effective given by various strategies with IV fluids.

Narcotic medications such as morphine and pethidine are no longer used for migraine treatment as other, more effective medications are available.

If you are having a typical or usual migraine further investigations are often not necessary. If your headache has suspicious elements then tests may be done.

