Migraine

What is migraine?

Migraine is a common condition that has to do with the brain. It usually (though not always) involves a throbbing headache, sometimes on one side. The pain gets worse when you move.

Many people with migraines will have visual symptoms before having the pain. This is called a **classic migraine**. You may see zigzag lines, shimmering or colored lights, or flashes of light in one side of your vision. These symptoms can last up to 30 minutes.

You can also have these visual symptoms without the head pain. This is called a **migraine variant**.

With migraine headaches, you may be sensitive to light, sound and smells. You may also be nauseous (sick to your stomach) or vomit (throwing up).

Who is at risk for migraine?

Migraine headaches affect about 2 out of 10 people. They happen more often to women than men. Migraines can run in families, and can affect both adults and young children. People who have migraines often have a history of motion sickness.

Migraine is a common condition, particularly among women.

What causes migraine?

It is not clear exactly how a migraine works. But doctors think it may be related to changes in some of your brain's chemicals.

Many people notice that certain things set off a migraine. Triggers can include:

- certain foods, such as red wine, aged cheeses and chocolate
- food products and additives, such as MSG (monosodium glutamate), nitrates and nitrites (used in hot dogs and other processed meats) and artificial sweeteners (like NutraSweet®)
- sleep problems (too much or too little sleep, or irregular sleep patterns)
- hormone changes in women, usually due to birth control pills, having your period, being pregnant or being in menopause
- stress, anxiety, or other emotional problems. Some people get migraines when stress levels change, as when they start vacation or finish a stressful project at work
- environmental factors, such as perfumes, certain lights or temperature changes

Find your migraine triggers

The best way to prevent migraine is to avoid triggers. If you do not know what triggers your migraine, try keeping a "headache diary."

Write down what you did just before a migraine started. Note what you ate, how well you slept, and any other factors that may have triggered your headache. Then avoid these triggers as much as you can.

How is migraine treated?

There are non-prescription and prescription medicines to help relieve migraine headache pain.

Over-the-counter medicines can help relieve the symptoms of a migraine attack. These can include aspirin and ibuprofen (such as Advil®). Caffeine can also help sometimes.

There are prescription medicines that aim to balance the chemical changes that lead to migraine. These include Imitrex®, Amerge®, Zomig® and others.

If your migraine attacks are severe or they happen often, your doctor might recommend you take medicine every day. There are different types, from beta-blockers to anti-seizure medicines. Your doctor will explain which one may help relieve your migraines.

Your doctor may want to learn more about the cause of your migraines. He or she might refer you to a neurologist or other specialist for more tests and exams.

Summary

Migraine is a common condition usually involving a throbbing headache, sometimes on one side. There can be visual symptoms too, though not always. These can include seeing zigzag lines, shimmering or colored lights, or flashes of light in one side of your vision. You can also have the visual symptoms without the head pain. Being sensitive to light, sounds and smells are other migraine symptoms.

There are triggers for migraine. They can include certain foods, alcohol and certain things in your environment.

Migraine may be treated with aspirin or ibuprofen. Sometimes, prescription medicines may be needed. If you get migraines frequently or they are severe, you may need medicine every day. Your doctor may recommend you visit a neurologist or other specialist for care.

If you have any questions about your eyes or your vision, speak with your ophthalmologist. He or she is committed to protecting your sight.

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COMPLIMENTS OF:

BRYAN VEKOVIUS, M.D.

OCULOPLASTIC SURGERY AND
NEURO-OPHTHALMOLOGY

450 ASHLEY RIDGE BLVD.
SHREVEPORT, LA 71106

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