

# MIGRAINE HEADACHE

More than 37 million Americans, many of them between the ages of 15 and 55, suffer from migraine headaches.

According to the National Headache Foundation, a headache qualifies as a migraine when:

- There have been at least five headache attacks, lasting four to 72 hours each.
- There is moderate to severe pulsating pain on one side of the head.
- The headache is caused by or causes a person to avoid physical activity.
- The person experiences one or more of the following: nausea or vomiting, hypersensitivity to light, or hypersensitivity to sound.

## WHAT TRIGGERS A MIGRAINE?

The Migraine Research Foundation identifies several groups of factors that can bring on a migraine.

**Lifestyle:** Changes in sleep patterns, fasting, skipping meals, dehydration, alcohol, exercise or stress.

**Environment:** Strong smells, bright or flickering lights, smoke or pollution, altitude, air pressure (during airplane travel, for example), or motion sickness while traveling in a car, train or boat.

**Weather:** High or low humidity, sudden or significant changes in temperature, changes in barometric pressure or bright sunlight.

**Hormones:** Changes in hormone levels, pregnancy, menstruation, menopause, hormone replacement therapy or oral contraceptives.

**Medication:** Overuse of pain medications; oral contraceptives; medication side-effects.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

About one-fifth of those who get migraines experience “aura” about 20 minutes to an hour before the pain starts. Aura is a visual disturbance that might appear as flashing lights, dots, wavy lines or blind spots.

Symptoms can vary from person to person, and a person might not have the same symptoms during every migraine. In addition to pulsing pain, the sufferer might experience nausea or vomiting; diarrhea; sweating or clammy hands; tingling or numbness in the hands, feet or face; sensitivity to sound or light; and tenderness of the scalp.

## DIAGNOSIS

There is no test to confirm the diagnosis of migraine. Furthermore, migraine is not easy to diagnose because its symptoms can indicate other health problems. Your doctor will talk with you about your symptoms and ask you whether there is a history of headaches in your family. A CT scan or an MRI might be used to rule out causes. Your doctor might ask you to keep a written record of your migraine attacks to help determine what triggers them.

## **TREATMENT**

Healthcare providers pursue two types of treatment: prevention of attacks, and relieving symptoms of attacks. Prevention might include medication or behavior management such as changes in exercise and stress management. Anti-inflammatory drugs, injections or nasal spray might be prescribed to help fight a migraine after it starts.

## **RESOURCES**

The UK Headache Center provides specialized care to patients suffering with headache.

The UK Headache Center is the only comprehensive headache clinic in Kentucky that has been accredited by the United Council for Neurologic Subspecialties, and it is one of only 20 centers in the country that provide advanced training in headache medicine to eligible physicians.

[ukhealthcare.uky.edu/kni/home](http://ukhealthcare.uky.edu/kni/home)

859-323-5661

800-333-8874

Migraine Research Foundation: [www.migraineresearchfoundation.org](http://www.migraineresearchfoundation.org)

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212-249-5402

National Headache Foundation:

[www.headaches.org](http://www.headaches.org)

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