

Migraine Headache



What Is a Migraine Headache?

Migraine headaches (migraines) are severe headaches that can last from four hours to three days. They are common, especially in women. The cause of migraines is not clear. They are related to family history and lifestyle factors, including:

- Stress or anxiety
- Hormonal changes
- Lack of food or sleep
- Certain foods and drinks
- Bright or flashing lights
- Illness or certain medicines



What Are the Warning Signs of a Migraine Headache?

Signs of a migraine can start one or two days before the headache comes on. These may include constipation, feeling depressed and irritable, and food cravings. Once the migraine begins, symptoms can include:

- Throbbing pain on one or both sides of your head
- Feeling sensitive to light and sound
- Feeling sick to your stomach or vomiting
- Blurred vision and feeling lightheaded

Some migraines include an aura. An aura can cause you to see spots, flashes of light, or bright spots. Sometimes auras can include a “pins and needles” feeling in the arms or legs.



How Is a Migraine Headache Diagnosed?

Your doctor will review your symptoms, give a physical examination, and ask you questions about family history. This is usually all the information your doctor needs to diagnose migraines. If your examination shows something worrisome, your doctor may order imaging tests, such as an MRI or a CAT scan. These tests are expensive, risky, and rarely needed to diagnose migraines.



How Is a Migraine Headache Treated?

Based on your symptoms, you and your doctor will decide on a treatment plan. The plan will help you learn how to prevent migraines and how to feel better if you do get a migraine. You can help prevent and treat your migraines when you:

- Practice good sleep habits
- Avoid foods that trigger migraine symptoms, such as chocolate, certain cheeses, or alcohol
- Reduce stress
- Take over-the-counter pain medicine (such as naproxen, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen) as soon as you notice symptoms and lie down in a quiet, dark room
- Prescription medicines may be needed if over-the-counter medicines do not help. Avoid using medicines called opioids to treat pain from migraines. They are not as effective as other medicines and have serious risks.

