Migraine Fact Sheet

Migraine is a neurological disorder characterized by an intense headache, in the presence of other symptoms, that can last for hours or days at a time and is sometimes crippling. In fact, migraine ranks as one of the top 20 most disabling conditions in the world. Migraine is considered chronic if headache occurs 15 or more days per month for three or more consecutive months. Intractable chronic migraine is defined as headache lasting at least four hours per day for 15 or more days per month, causing at least moderate disability, and not responding to three or more preventive drugs.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MIGRAINE HEADACHE?

Migraine headache is typically characterized by an intense, throbbing pain that is usually located on one side of the head at onset. It is often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and extreme sensitivity to light and/or sound, although symptoms can vary widely by individual.

Less than one-third of sufferers also experience what neurologists refer to as an “aura.” An aura is a set of visual disturbances that appear in one or both eyes as flashing lights, wavy or jagged lines, or blind spots. These symptoms usually occur 20 minutes to an hour before the pain begins.

WHO GETS MIGRAINE?

- Although migraine affects both men and women, almost three times more women experience migraine headache.
- Migraine can occur at any age, although it is most common between the ages of 40 and 45 for women. Men typically experience migraine at a slightly younger age.
- Almost half of all patients with migraines are not properly diagnosed.
- Migraine is often an inherited affliction.
  - If both parents suffer from migraine headache, there is a 75-percent chance that their children will have them.
  - When only one parent is a migraine sufferer, there is a 50-percent chance that their children will inherit the condition.
  - If a distant relative suffers from migraine headache, there is a 20-percent chance that descendents will have it as well.

FAST FACT

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 10 percent of adults worldwide suffer from migraine, and 1.7 to 4 percent of adults have headaches on 15 or more days per month.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF MIGRAINE?

Although there is no known cause for migraine, it is thought to be caused by an underlying brain disorder that affects the blood vessels causing inflammation which

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disturbs the surrounding nerves. The nerve endings, in turn, are responsible for the head pain.\(^2\)

Several factors have been identified as triggers for recurring attacks. These include:

- **Diet** (alcohol, cheese, caffeine, skipping meals)
- **Hormonal changes** (menstrual cycle, oral contraceptives)
- **Activity** (irregular sleep patterns, physical activity, jet lag)
- **Environment** (weather changes, secondhand smoke)
- **Sensory stimulation** (bright lights, odd smells, loud sounds)
- **Stress and medications**

**WHAT IS THE COST OF MIGRAINE?**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), migraine has a significant impact on public health.\(^5\) For example, in the U.S., more than half of people who suffer from migraine headache have reported a 50 percent or more decrease in productivity associated with work and/or school. And **24 percent of migraine sufferers** have reported experiencing an attack that was so severe that they had to be rushed to an emergency room for care.\(^2\)

In terms of monetary cost, it has been estimated that migraine headache is one of the most expensive neurological disorders. In 2004, the total cost attributed to migraine amounted to €27 billion in Europe alone, while costs for other headaches were projected to be just as large.\(^6\) The financial burden is further complicated by the estimated 190 million work days lost each year in the EU due to migraine.\(^7\)

Oftentimes, migraine is trivialized or perceived to be a minor inconvenience since it poses no immediate threat of death. However, if left untreated, overall quality of life suffers greatly as migraine accounts for **1.3 percent** of all years of life lost to disability worldwide.\(^4\)

**RESOURCES**

People who think they might be suffering from migraine should talk with their physicians or other healthcare providers. More information about migraine headache is available from the following websites:

- World Health Organization, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- National Headache Foundation, [www.headaches.org](http://www.headaches.org)
- European Headache Federation, [www.ehf-org.org](http://www.ehf-org.org)
- British Association for the Study of Headache, [www.bash.org.uk](http://www.bash.org.uk)
- Migraine Action, [www.migraine.org.uk](http://www.migraine.org.uk)
- The Migraine Trust, [www.migrainetrust.org](http://www.migrainetrust.org)

**REFERENCES**


