

# Migraine Headaches

Migraine headaches are painful, throbbing headaches that can last from 4 to 72 hours.

Experts aren't sure what causes migraines. They believe that changes in the activity of brain cells may lead to inflammation in certain nerves.

Migraines often run in families, so genetics may play a role for some people.

Women are more likely to get migraines than men.

You may also be at higher risk if you are a teenager or young adult.

Migraines often start during these years but may peak in your 30s. And they often stop completely after age 50.

Triggers are things that can cause a migraine headache to start. They are different for each person.

Triggers include changes in daily routine, foods, hormones, and medicines.

They can also include lights, odors, changes in the weather, or other things in the environment.

Strong emotions, such as depression or anxiety, can also be triggers.

The most common symptom of a migraine headache is a throbbing pain on one side of your head or behind an eye.

Some people have an aura before or during the headache. During an aura, you may see spots or flashing lights.

Other symptoms of migraine include nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light.

A doctor can usually tell if you have a migraine by asking about your symptoms and examining you.

Your doctor may order other tests, such as a CT scan or an MRI, if the doctor thinks your symptoms may be caused by another disease.

You can't cure migraines, but medicines and other treatments may help you feel better. Avoiding triggers can help too.

You may be able to treat your headaches with over-the-counter pain medicine.

If that doesn't work, your doctor can prescribe stronger medicine.

You may also try medicine to help prevent migraines.

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Some medicines can stop a migraine while it's happening. These are sometimes called abortive medicines and include: Over-the-counter medicines. Some over-the-counter medicines combine acetaminophen, aspirin, and caffeine.

Triptans (serotonin receptor agonists).

Ergotamine derivatives.

Newer medicines include calcitonin gene-related peptides (CGRP) also known as antagonists (gepants).

Some medicines can help prevent a migraine. These medicines can reduce how many migraines you get, reduce how long they last, and make your symptoms less severe.

These medicines are often called preventive medicines and include: anticonvulsants; antidepressants; beta-blockers; CGRP antagonists; botulinum toxin, such as Botox.

This is used for prevention if you have chronic migraines.

Several proteins called neuropeptides have been discovered to cause migraines. Newer medicines target these proteins.

It's important to know that medicines to prevent migraines may cause side effects. You may need to decide which bothers you more—the side effects of the medicine or your migraines.

Medicines may not prevent every migraine. So you may still need to take another kind of medicine that can stop a migraine after it has started.

There are some other things you can do when you feel a migraine starting.

Stop what you are doing, and take your medicine.

Don't wait for the migraine to get worse. Take your medicine exactly as your doctor told you to.

Keep your medicine with you at all times so you are ready when a headache starts.

Rest in a quiet, dark room until your headache is gone. Close your eyes, and try to relax or go to sleep. Don't watch TV or read.

Put a cold, moist cloth or cold pack on the painful area. Leave it there for 10 to 20 minutes at a time.

Put a thin cloth between the cold pack and your skin.

Relax your muscles. Have someone gently massage your neck and shoulders.

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Having migraines can be awful. But even though they make you feel bad, they don't cause long-term damage.

And you may be able to reduce how often you have them, how bad they are, and how long they last.