

MIGRAINE AND HEADACHE AWARENESS MONTH

Headaches

June is Migraine and Headache Awareness month. According to the National Headache Foundation, 47% of adults in the U.S. experience some form of headache every year. Fortunately, all types can be controlled. Knowing how to diagnose and manage headaches can decrease the severity of attacks.



Types of Headaches

There are three different types of headaches: tension, cluster, and migraine. These types are explained further below.

Tension: Tension headaches are the most prevalent type, occurring in men, women, and children. These headaches are defined as a tightening or pressing sensation on both sides of the head. This form can last anywhere from minutes to days and can cause light or sound sensitivity.

Cluster: Cluster headaches do not occur frequently. In fact, according to the American Headache Society, this type only affects about 1% (mostly men) of the U.S. population. This form causes pain in one side of the head or around the eye. The attacks can last from 15 minutes to 3 hours. Cluster headaches can cause nasal congestion, drooping eyelids, and facial or forehead sweating.

Migraine: Migraines are recurrent headaches that can last 4 to 72 hours. These headaches cause pulsating pain, usually on one side of the head.

Migraines

Migraines can affect both men and women of any age. Chronic migraine disease can also develop if migraines occur for at least 15 days every month for at least 6 months.

Statistics of Migraines

According to the American Migraine Foundation—

- 36 million people in the U.S. suffer from migraines.
- Women are 3 times more likely than men to experience migraines.
- 3% of the U.S. population has developed chronic migraine disease.

Causes and Triggers of Migraines

The precise causes of migraines are unknown. However, certain triggers can cause migraines to develop. Triggers are not the same in everyone and can include, but are not limited to:

- consuming alcohol (red wine in particular)
- skipping meals
- having too little or too much sleep
- being exposed to bright lights, loud noises, or strong odors
- eating foods containing certain additives (i.e., nitrates, monosodium gluconate [MSG], etc.)

Symptoms of Migraines

In addition to head pain, other symptoms can happen in a migraine attack. Nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light and sound can also be experienced. Many people also suffer from aura during a migraine. Aura causes sensory symptoms that usually happen anywhere from 10 to 30 minutes before the migraine starts. Symptoms of aura are listed below.

- disturbances in vision (i.e., seeing flashing lights or blind spots), smell, taste, or touch
- feeling numb or tingly in the face or hands
- feeling mentally “hazy”

Management of Migraines

There is no cure for migraine headaches, but treatment options are available. Treatment can include both lifestyle changes and medications.



Lifestyle Changes: Migraine reduction and management can be achieved through changing lifestyle behaviors. Avoiding triggers, healthy eating habits, and exercising can reduce the frequency or severity of migraine attacks. Limiting caffeine and alcohol intake can also help.

Medication: Abortive medications are used to treat a migraine once the attack has started. These drugs produce the best results if taken right when the symptoms start to occur. Preventative medications are used to stop migraines before they develop. These drugs are often taken daily.