

Easing the pain of migraines

SOOTHING ADVICE TO HELP MANAGE PAINFUL HEADACHES

A really bad headache doesn't happen every day. When it does, you think you know what to do: Take a painkiller and wait for the pain to subside. Or should you see your doctor instead? Could it be a migraine?

The following information may help you decide.

Understanding migraines

Migraines occur at irregular intervals. They can last four to 72 hours or longer. Pulsing or throbbing pain typically begins on one side of the head. But it can spread to both sides.

Along with pain, migraines can cause nausea; vomiting; and sensitivity to bright light, sound, and odors.

Some people may experience auras—visual disturbances that appear 20 minutes to an hour before a migraine. Auras can last from 5 to 30 minutes, during which you may see jagged, wavy lines; dots; or flashing lights.

Auras can also cause blind spots in your vision, difficulty speaking, a tingling sensation, or numbness on one side of the body.

According to the National Headache Foundation, women are three times more likely than men to have migraines. Some women have migraines due to hormonal changes during menstruation.

And while these ferocious head-

aches can occur at any age, migraines are most common in people between the ages of 15 and 55 and in people who have a family history of migraines.

Different things can trigger migraines for different people. Common triggers can include: ▶ Bright lights and loud noise ▶ Certain foods, such as aged cheeses and smoked fish, nitrates in meats, foods containing monosodium glutamate (MSG), chocolate, and nuts ▶ Caffeinated drinks or alcohol ▶ Irregular sleeping habits and mealtimes ▶ Certain medicines ▶ Stress and depression

A plan for relief If migraines are a problem for you, it's important to work with your doctor on a management plan.

You'll need to provide information on the frequency, duration, and severity of the pain. It's also a good idea to write down what you were doing around the time a headache started. That can help you identify and avoid headache triggers.

While there is no cure for migraines, your doctor may recommend nonprescription or prescription medicines to help reduce the frequency and severity of headaches.

Training in relaxation, biofeedback, or stress management may also help, the American Academy of Neurology Foundation advises.

Additional sources: American Headache Society; American Medical Association



Call the Customer Service number on the back of your member ID card to find out if prescription migraine medications are covered.