Migraine

Migraine is a complex health condition with a wide variety of symptoms. For many people the main symptom is a painful headache. Other symptoms include disturbed vision; sensitivity to light, sound and smells; feeling sick; and vomiting.

What is a Migraine?

Migraine is the most common neurological condition in the developed world. It is more prevalent than asthma, diabetes and epilepsy combined. In the UK there are almost six million people who get migraines. One third of sufferers will experience significant disability as a result of their migraines at some, or all, stages of their lives. There are an estimated 190,000 migraine attacks in the UK every day.

Women are more likely to suffer from migraine attacks than men. Attacks can start at any age, but they are most likely to start in your teenage years or in your early 20s.

Types of Migraine and Symptoms

There are several different types of migraine. The most common fall into two categories:

- **Migraine without aura** (70% to 90% of people with migraine suffer from this type)
- **Migraine with aura** (10% to 30% of people with migraine suffer from this type)

Aura

Aura is a term used to describe a neurological symptom of migraine, the most common of which is a visual disturbance (such as blind spots, flashing lights before your eyes, or temporary blindness). Other aura symptoms can include:

- Numbness or tingling
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- A feeling of spinning (vertigo)
- Speech and hearing problems
- Memory changes
- Feelings of fear or confusion
- Partial paralysis or fainting

Migraines have well-defined stages, which may or may not include the above aura symptoms. It is these stages, and their symptoms, that distinguish a migraine from a headache. For more details on the different stages of migraine, see **The Migraine Trust – About section**.

The symptoms of migraine vary from person to person. You may have different symptoms during different attacks, with attacks varying in length and frequency.

Migraines usually last from 4 to 72 hours and they can have an enormous impact on your work, family and social life. They can happen from once or twice a year up to several times a week.

What causes a Migraine?

There is no known cause of migraine, although most people who get migraines are genetically predisposed to them. If you are susceptible to migraine, there are certain triggers which may cause one. These can include stress, lack of food, alcohol, hormonal changes in women, lack of sleep, and the environment (such as humidity or sudden changes in temperature).

How can I treat a migraine?

The complex nature of migraine means that the treatments available are varied and differ from person to person. There is no standard treatment for migraine and there is currently no cure. However, migraine is a condition which responds well to self-help. Access to up-to-date information, a strong partnership with your GP, treatment where needed, and the support of those around you, can all help you to take control of your condition.

See how to '**Help someone with Migraine**' section on the Migraine Trust's website.

Migraine in Later Life

Generally, migraine improves as you reach your 50s and 60s. Studies have shown that 40% of people who get migraines no longer have migraine attacks by the age of 65 years old, and it is rare for migraine to occur for the first time at this age.

As you get older, the pain associated with your migraine tends to be less severe and the attacks tend to be less frequent.

Some people worry that frequent migraine attacks may lead to cognitive decline as they get older, but research has found that there is no link.

Information and Advice

The following organisations can provide you with more information about migraine and about how you can access help and support.

The Migraine Trust is a medical research charity for migraine. They are committed to supporting sufferers and their families by funding and promoting research, improving diagnosis and treatment, providing information, and raising awareness of migraine as a significant public health

problem.

The Migraine Trust's **top tips** for taking control of your migraine are:

- See your GP and get a diagnosis.
- Understand the difference between a migraine and other types of headache.
- Learn about your migraine triggers by keeping a diary about your migraines for three months.
- Understand your medication, why you are taking it, how much you take, and what it is meant to do.
- Stay hydrated, try not to get thirsty.
- Eat regularly and keep sweet snacks for treats.
- Try to maintain a regular sleep pattern.
- Take regular exercise at the right pace for you.
- Be aware of stress – adopt a balanced lifestyle.
- Think about lighting and your posture, particularly if you work.

Other Useful Information

- NHS.UK
- Healthtalkonline
- Connected Voice Advocacy may help you get the support, treatments and information you need.

> **Please note** – The content on this website is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. If you are feeling unwell, make an appointment to see your GP or contact NHS 111. In an emergency, dial 999.

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Useful Organisations

The Migraine Trust

Email: info@migrainetrust.org

Website: www.migrainetrust.org

Telephone: 020 3951 0150

Address: 4th Floor Mitre House , EC4Y 1BN

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

healthtalk.org

Email: info@healthtalkonline.org

Website: www.healthtalk.org

Connected Voice Advocacy

Email: advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk

Website: http://www.connectedvoice.org.uk/services/advocacy

Telephone: 0191 235 7013

Address: One Strawberry Lane, NE1 4BX

Patient Information Centre – Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW)

Website: www.cntw.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0191 246 7288

Address: St Nicholas Hospital, NE3 3XT

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