

## H2-5 Migraine Headaches

### Migraine Headaches

Headaches are a common symptom of stress, with migraine headaches being one of the most incapacitating varieties. The pain can keep a person from functioning normally and performing daily activities; particular situations or substances often trigger the headaches. It is estimated that migraine headaches affect 28 million people in the United States.

### Symptoms

- Headache pain that is moderate to severe and lasts for 4 to 72 hours
- Throbbing pain located on one side of the head (it can start on one side and spread to the other or be on both sides)
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Sensitivity to light, sound, or odors
- Pain that becomes worse with movement
- Migraine aura: neurological disturbances that occur before the migraine headache begins. The disturbances are usually visual, such as seeing flashing lights or experiencing small blind spots; less commonly, ringing in the ears or numbness may occur. Not all people with migraines experience auras.

### Triggers

- Stress
- Exposure to bright lights or loud noises
- Feeling overly tired
- Hormonal changes in women
- Lack of sleep
- Some foods such as chocolate and some cheeses
- Some food additives (nitrites, nitrates, and MSG)
- Some alcoholic beverages, such as red wine

A diary of when you have a headache may help determine what triggers or influences your headaches. A diary also helps monitor how well medication and lifestyle changes are working.

### Treatment

If you have severe headaches, it is important to consult a health care provider. Medications can be used to relieve pain and restore function during attacks. Stress management strategies such as exercise, relaxation training, biofeedback, and avoiding triggers may also have a role in treatment.

SOURCE: Migraine headache. 2000. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 284 (20). Reprinted by permission of the American Medical Association.