

# Getting help for migraines



## What are migraines?

Migraines are a kind of headache that can also involve other symptoms. Migraines can affect both adults and children, and are more common in women than in men. Migraines often start off mild and then get worse.

## What are the symptoms of migraines in adults?

Symptoms can include:

- Headache – The headache gets worse over several hours and is usually throbbing. It often affects one side of the head
- Nausea and sometimes vomiting
- Feeling sensitive to light and noise – lying down in a quiet, dark room often helps
- Aura – Some people have something called a migraine “aura.” An aura is a symptom or feeling that happens before or during the migraine headache. Each person’s aura is different, but in most cases the aura affects the vision. You might see flashing lights, bright spots, or zig-zag lines, or lose part of your vision. You might have numbness and tingling of the lips, lower face, and fingers of one hand. Some people hear sounds

or have ringing in their ears as part of their aura. The aura usually lasts a few minutes to an hour and then goes away, but most often lasts 15 to 30 minutes. Women who get migraines with aura usually cannot take birth control pills because they can increase the risk of a stroke.

Many people get other migraine symptoms that happen several hours or even a day before the headache. Doctors call these “premonitory” or “prodromal” symptoms and they might include excessive yawning, feeling depressed, food cravings, irritability, constipation, or stiff neck muscles.

## Is there a test for migraines?

No, there is no test. But scheduling an exam with your medical provider will provide insight into your symptoms and pain.

## Should I see a medical provider?

Yes. If you think you’re having migraines, you should talk to your medical provider. You should also see a medical provider if your migraines get worse or more frequent, or if you develop new symptoms.

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## Is there anything I can do to prevent migraines?

Yes. Some people find that their migraines are triggered by certain things, so if you can identify and avoid those triggers, you can lower your chances of getting migraines.

You can also keep a migraine diary. In the diary, write down every time you have a migraine and what you ate and did before it started. This can help you determine if there is anything you should avoid in the future. You can also write down what medicine you took and whether or not it helped.

Common migraine triggers include:

- Stress
- Hormonal changes
- Meal skipping
- Changes in the weather
- Excessive or insufficient sleep
- Bright or flashing lights
- Alcohol consumption
- Certain drinks or foods such as red wine, aged cheese, and hot dogs

If your migraines are frequent or severe, your medical provider can suggest other ways to help prevent them. For example, it might help to learn relaxation techniques and ways to manage stress.

Some women get migraines just before or during their period.

There are some medicines that can help with pre-period and stress-related migraines.

## How are migraines treated?

There are many different medicines that can help with migraines, and your medical provider can help you find the best treatment for your situation.

For mild migraines, your medical provider might suggest an over-the-counter medicine such as acetaminophen (example: Tylenol), ibuprofen (examples: Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (example: Aleve). There's also a medicine that combines acetaminophen, aspirin, and caffeine (example: Excedrin).

For more severe migraines, there are prescription medicines that can help. Some, such as medicines called triptans, help to relieve the pain from a migraine attack. Other prescription medicines can help to make migraine attacks happen less frequently. If you have severe nausea or vomiting with your migraines, there are medicines that can help with that, too.

Do not try to treat frequent migraines on your own with non-prescription pain medications—taking non-prescription pain meds too often can cause even more headaches.

## What if I want to get pregnant?

If you want to get pregnant, talk to your medical provider before you start trying. Some medicines used to treat and prevent migraines are not safe to use during pregnancy, so you might need to switch the medication you're on now.

Some women notice that their migraines actually get better during pregnancy and breastfeeding, which is due to hormonal changes in their body.

## Useful websites

These websites include information about living with migraines, patient guides and tools, provider locators, and support groups for those who experience the same condition as you.

- American Migraine Foundation ([americanmigrainefoundation.org](http://americanmigrainefoundation.org))
- National Headache Foundation ([headaches.org](http://headaches.org))

## Migraine apps

These apps can help you track your symptoms, identify triggers, manage your pain, and connect with others.

- **Migraine Buddy** (Android and iPhone – free)
- **Migraine Monitor** (Android and iPhone – free)
- **N1-Headache** (Android and iPhone – free)