

Understanding Migraines

Migraine is not just another headache. It is an unpredictable and painful condition that may include several different characteristics. The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke defines migraines as recurring attacks of moderate to severe headache pain. During migraines, people can experience varying characteristics, such as nausea, vomiting, or sensitivity to light and sound.

- The International Headache Society's diagnostic criteria for migraine includes at least five attacks lasting 4-72 hours if untreated.
- Many things can trigger a migraine, including anxiety, stress, lack of food or sleep, exposure to light, hormonal changes, and even weather changes.
- Roughly 1/3 of affected individuals can anticipate the onset of a migraine because it is preceded by an "aura," visual disturbances that appear as flashing lights, zig-zag lines or a temporary loss of vision.
- In a survey of self-reported migraineurs, nearly 1/3 of patients who experienced nausea with a migraine indicated that nausea interfered with taking oral medication.

Migraine Prevalence

Approximately 36 million Americans suffer from migraine, which is more than 10 percent of the population.

- Migraine is three times more common in women than men.
 - Approximately 18 percent of women suffer from migraine in the United States.
- Migraine most often begins at puberty and mostly affects those between 35 and 45 years.

Treating Migraines

There is no cure for migraine since its pathophysiology has yet to be fully understood.

- Treatments for migraine include pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic options.
- Therapies designed to limit daily discomfort, as well as stress management strategies such as exercise, relaxation techniques and biofeedback mechanisms, may reduce the number and severity of migraine attacks.