

What to do after the diagnosis

Understanding the impact of migraine



If you have severe headache, sensitivity to light or sound or odors during a headache, or if you get nauseous and vomit, you may have migraine and should talk to a specialist to get an accurate diagnosis.

Symptoms of Migraine:

- + Severe headache
- + Sensitivity to light
- + Sensitivity to sound
- + Sensitivity to odors
- + Nausea
- + Vomiting

Migraine is a disabling disease that impacts more than 36 million Americans. While for some migraine is a minor, intermittent nuisance, for others it is a disabling, chronic disorder that has the power to be life-wrecking.

"Migraine transcends the age spectrum, it transcends gender and it transcends socioeconomic class. Everyone is affected," says David Dodick, MD, Professor of Neurology at Mayo Clinic and chairman of the American Migraine Foundation.

Migraine is an extremely common neurological illness, yet it is often

misunderstood or incorrectly diagnosed. Many people wave it off simply as bad headaches. Because of the stigma, fewer than 50% of people who meet the criteria of the illness have ever been diagnosed. Even fewer have ever talked with a doctor or received treatment.

"Migraine can be a life-changing, debilitating condition that affects all aspects of life," says Dr. Dawn Buse, a clinical psychologist and researcher specializing in headache and pain at the Montefiore Medical Center and Associate Professor of Neurology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine.



Mental Toll of Migraine: How it impacts you and your loved ones

One of the main ways migraine affects aspects of life outside of immediate physical pain is that it can isolate people from friends and family. People with migraine often have to miss social or family events, or can't give their spouse and kids as much attention as they would like. They can fall behind on work or miss out on social gatherings. Even if they are able to be in attendance, they may feel unable to live in the moment because they're in pain so much of the time. It's no wonder that migraine is oftentimes accompanied by depression and anxiety. This feeling is exacerbated by the fact that most people who don't have migraine don't understand how serious or debilitating it is, so people with migraine can feel isolated and misunderstood.

"People with migraine may feel like life is passing them by. They may miss out work, social and family events and they may feel that their friends, families and coworkers do not understand what they are going through," says Dr. Buse.

This ripples throughout families, friend groups, and offices. Your boss could be upset if you miss a deadline or can't function at a normal level at work. Your spouse could feel hurt or frustrated that you're not able to act like yourself while experiencing a migraine attack, and your kids could be upset they're not getting as much quality time with you. Friends might not understand why you have to miss out on events, and it could isolate you from your social circle.

Taking Care of Yourself

To help combat feelings of loneliness and depression, it helps to reach out to family and friends and try to explain what you're going through. Most people want to help you, but because they don't understand the condition they don't know how. Though migraine is common, it is often misunderstood or thought of as 'just a headache'. And the stigma doesn't just stop there.

"There's also a stigma in educational settings and even in medical settings," says Dr. Robbins, MD, Associate Professor of Clinical Neurology at the Montefiore Medical Center.

That's why finding the right doctor

and healthcare team to help guide your treatment plan is key. "There's a large, dedicated community of headache specialists that are out there who can really help," says Dr. Robbins.

Once you have a headache specialist and other healthcare team members managing your condition, turn to your social support network. Talking about migraine and finding support within family and friends will also help you take care of yourself. Educating your network about migraine can help take away the stigma that persists at work and at home and feelings of guilt and isolation.

You can also turn to the large community

of advocates and people on social media who also live with migraine, and who really speak your language. The *Move Against Migraine* Facebook Group, for example, provides community support and access to doctors. Combating feelings of isolation and depression as soon as possible will help you cope with future migraine attacks, easing at least part of the burden.

"Getting help from your family, getting help from your colleagues, getting help medically and getting help in how you can cope with it is extremely important," says Dr. Robbins. "Do it earlier, before it's too late, before migraine becomes chronic."



Three Essentials of Migraine Support

- 1. Community:** Help educate your family, friends and coworkers on the impact of migraine
- 2. Professional Health:** Find a doctor and a medical healthcare team who understand the disease and are prepared to explore custom treatment options.
- 3. Self Care:** Lifestyle and behavioral changes like getting more sleep and reducing stress may help you control your migraine symptoms. If you feel that stress, depression or anxiety have become overwhelming consider adding a psychologist to your healthcare team.

Finding Hope Through the Pain

Getting your family and friends involved in your migraine treatment will help you cope when migraine symptoms strike, and help make your living, work, and social environments more comfortable. With one in four households affected by migraine, the most important thing to remember is that you are not alone. The second thing to remember is that there is hope.

"Unlike most conditions, migraine tends to get better over a lifetime," says Dr. Buse. "And for now, there are many effective treatments including medication, behavioral therapies and lifestyle enhancements that can help lessen the burden of living with migraine and help you live the life you want to live."

Those treatments may be medication, they may be interventions and they may be lifestyle and behavior treatments including biofeedback, relaxation training and cognitive behavioral therapy or stress management. Work with a specialist to find the right treatment options for you, and you might be amazed at how your quality of life improves.

As more and more people speak out about migraine, and more and more people become educated about the illness, stigma can decrease and funding for research will increase, leading to more effective treatment options and, hopefully one day, a cure.

"We're going to define this disease that's been too often marginalized in medicine," says Dr. Dodick.

The mission of the American Migraine Foundation is to mobilize a community for patient support and advocacy, as well as drive and support impactful research that translates into advances for patients with migraine and other disabling diseases that cause severe head pain.

American Migraine Foundation

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