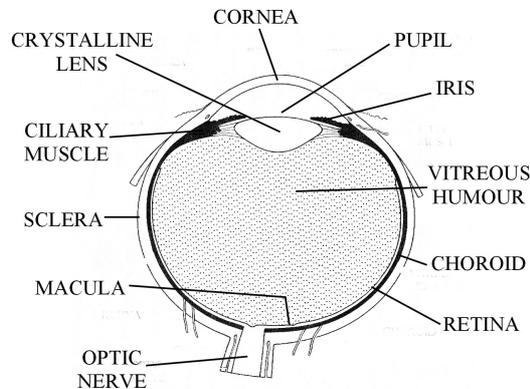


migraine



What is a Migraine?

Migraine (pronounced either 'my-graine' or 'me-graine') is a specific condition. Symptoms include a throbbing, pulsating pain in the head; flashing lights - either stars, zigzags or rolling fluorescent shapes; nausea and/or vomiting; sensitivity to light, sound or smell; tingling or numbness in the arms and legs; and even temporary paralysis. Usually the sufferer will know when an attack is starting, and can find that ordinary painkillers don't help very much. The attack can last for anything from a few hours to four or five days.

What Causes Migraine?

Some sufferers know exactly what triggers an attack - it may be chocolate, cheese or orange juice; it may be alcoholic drinks; it may be certain food additives; it can be hunger. Caffeine can trigger an attack in some; it can stop the attack in others. Very often, the main cause is stress. In women, hormonal changes are quite a common cause, as are certain lighting conditions, especially flashing or flickering lights. Not all sufferers can pinpoint the cause.

Who Gets Migraines?

About one in ten people get migraines, and the majority are women. They are not related to race or intelligence, but they do run in families. Many people say they get migraines when in fact they just have bad headaches.

What Happens During a Migraine Attack?

The exact reason why migraine occurs is not entirely understood. However, research has found that attacks are related to a chemical called *serotonin*, which is stored in cells in the stomach and intestine, and also in the platelets in the blood. The level of serotonin in the blood changes during a migraine, and some of the migraine drugs available have been developed to treat this.

The migraine usually takes a while to reach its peak, and the sufferer usually knows when an attack is starting, so can try to take the medication. Warning signs can include mood swings, tiredness or craving for certain foods; some sufferers start off with a visual disturbance like flashing lights, or tingling or numbness down one side, or even difficulty in speaking. For some sufferers, however, the migraine starts with a severe headache on one side of the head, which gets worse and is often accompanied by nausea and/or vomiting.

When the migraine reaches its peak, many sufferers have to lie down in a darkened room, or go to sleep. Once the migraine has begun to wear off, many sufferers feel tired and drained, whereas others may feel much more buoyant.

Do Glasses Help?

Sometimes - particularly when the migraines are related to bright lights - glasses can be of some help. Tinted lenses can be helpful, although some sufferers find that simply having the prescription corrected can help with the migraines, without the need for a tint. In other people glasses may make no difference to the migraines, but may be needed anyway to help with other problems.

Should I See the Doctor?

Sufferers should see their GP, since there are many medications available which the GP can prescribe. However, many doctors will advise patients to have a sight test anyway, especially if the patient is experiencing other problems.

What Treatments are Available?

There are many tablets available which can be used to treat migraine. Most contain strong painkillers together with other medications such as caffeine and ergotamine. Some medicines are taken every day to prevent migraines; others can be used when an attack starts.

Some people find alternative therapies to be successful, such as aromatherapy or chiropractic, and herbs such as feverfew can be of some help.

Recently a heart operation has been developed to block a small hole in the heart, which is common in migraine sufferers. This prevents blood mixing in the heart, and once the hole is sealed, many patients find that the migraines cease.

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