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# Migraine

*More than a Bad Headache*

## Understanding Migraine

Recent studies indicate that migraine is actually more than just a terrible headache. In fact, a migraine episode may or may not include a headache, which is referred to as “atypical” migraine. Many *migraineurs* (people with migraine) do not have severe headaches as a dominant symptom. In her book, *The Migraine Brain*, Dr. Carolyn Bernstein, a neurologist who suffers from migraines herself, describes migraine as a chronic, neurological condition that is inherited and affects the central nervous system. Headache may be one of the symptoms, but migraine almost never consists of head pain alone.

According to Drs. Michael Teixido and John Carey, there are currently 28 million Americans who experience “classic” migraine headaches. Thirteen people out of 100 are likely to have migraine. This is as common as diabetes and asthma combined. Women are three times more likely than men to suffer from migraine. Ten percent of children between the ages of 5-15 suffer from migraine. The number of people suffering with atypical forms of migraine is unknown.

## Common Features of Migraine

Migraine has puzzled doctors and sufferers for thousands of years because of its wide range of symptoms from one person to the next, which include:

- Throbbing or pulsating pain on one side of head or face that lasts 4-72 hours
- Nausea and/or vomiting (79%)
- Dizziness or vertigo (25%)
- Sensitivity to light and /or sound (>80%)
- Ringing in the ears or ear pain
- Visual aura that precedes onset of pain
- Slurred speech and/or paralysis
- Fatigue (75%)
- Bowel symptoms

If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your physician for proper medical evaluation and treatment.

## Common Migraine Triggers

Since research indicates that the migraine brain may be more sensitive than that of those who do not experience migraine, almost anything can trigger the onset of migraine. Common triggers are:

- Environmental—odors, noise, changes in weather, bright lights, injury or head/neck conditions
- Food—fermented products (red wine, aged cheese, yeast in bread and yogurt, etc.), coffee, chocolate, MSG, nitrates used as preservatives
- Physiological—stress, sleep changes, hunger, exercise, hormonal changes

## Impact on Work & Life

One in every four U.S. households includes a person who gets migraines. More than \$1 billion is spent annually in healthcare costs for migraineurs. Migraine costs employers at least \$13 billion annually due to absenteeism and reduced effectiveness at work. Fifty percent of migraineurs report that migraine has a negative impact on their career, and 25% reported job loss as a result of migraine. Forty-three percent reported negative impact on relationships with their children. Migraineurs may be at increased risk for other conditions like depression (64%) and anxiety (60%)

## Treatment Options

According to Drs. Teixido and Carey, the mainstay treatment for migraine symptoms is trigger identification and avoidance. Medication may alleviate pain and suppress symptoms, but when taken frequently, can worsen the problem by causing rebound symptoms more intense than the original attack. The best treatment results are achieved by migraineurs who work to understand what migraine is and how it is affecting their lives. This allows a team approach with the physician and better outcomes.

## What is an Employee Assistance Program?

The EAP provides confidential and professional assistance in order to resolve problems that affect employees' personal lives or job performance.

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