

How to help someone with migraine

Migraine is a neurological condition which is so much more than “just a headache” and a leading cause of disability worldwide.

Headache is a term used to describe aching or pain that occurs in one or more areas of the head, face, mouth, or neck. Headache can be chronic, recurrent, or occasional. The pain can be mild or severe enough to disrupt daily activities. Headaches are a symptom of many conditions and management requires accurate determination of the cause.

Migraine, on the other hand, is a neurological disorder typified by unbearable head pain along with various additional symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, photophobia, noise intolerance and occasionally visual sensory disturbances. An attack can last from a few hours to a few days. Even when not experiencing an attack, someone with migraine can still be more sensitive to noise, light, smell and stress than someone who does not have migraine.

Triggers are factors that may increase the risk of migraine attacks in someone who lives with migraine. Triggers do not cause migraine but are thought to activate the process in predisposed migraine sufferers.

Triggers can include:

- Changes in hormone levels, especially oestrogen
- Stress including periods of high stress, long term stress or stress letdowns
- Neck muscle tightness
- Changes in barometric pressure
- Dehydration and electrolyte imbalance
- High altitude
- Sun exposure, glare, heat
- Food triggers (e.g. preservatives such sulphites)
- Alcohol
- Excess caffeine
- Skipping meals
- Changes in blood sugar (e.g. hypoglycaemia)
- Not enough protein
- Lack of sleep or disrupted sleep
- Some medications, such as synthetic oestrogen or reliance on painkillers

TREATING MIGRAINE

A holistic treatment approach looks to address the root cause of migraine by improving digestive, hormonal, musculoskeletal and nervous system health by making changes in nutrition, lifestyle, sleep, stress, hydration and movement. This means that someone choosing this approach make need to make changes in many areas of their life.

Your support of these changes is key to supporting their overall health.



WHILE WE WORK ON IMPROVING SOMEONE'S OVERALL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE TO MIGRAINE, BELOW ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT TO MANAGE TRIGGERS AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES:

1. Change the lighting

Light actually hurts during a migraine. It's known as photophobia. You can help by turning off bright (especially fluorescent) lights and closing the curtains. If a little light is needed, then soft or low lamps are better than ceiling lights.

2. Be mindful of perfumes and strong-smelling foods.

Strong smells can nauseate a migraine sufferer, who are thought to also has a heightened sense of smell. Which smells and odours cause problems can differ for individuals – check which ones affect the migraine sufferer in your life.

3. Keep it quiet.

The migraine sufferer is very sensitive to noise. Just like it is believed they have a super sense of smell, they also can seem to hear sounds that others can't. What sounds quiet (or even normal level) for you can be deafening to someone who has a migraine. Speak softly and gently, and avoid any unnecessary sounds such as television, music and loud conversations.

4. Understand when they cancel social or work commitments.

As a migraine sufferer myself, I've had to cancel so many plans which results in feelings of guilt. Plan another event or outing with them in the future to show that you understand and are still there for them, no matter what. Check in on what is fun for your migraine sufferer.

5. Ask how you can help.

Offers to babysit, cover a work project, pick up a prescription or supplement, tidy up or help around the house, drive to appointments or pass on messages on a migraine sufferer's behalf will be gratefully received.

6. Be supportive of their self-care.

Whether it is a change to diet or a need for quiet time, help them by not tempting them with foods or alcohol they are trying to avoid or crowding in on their downtime.

7. Understand that migraine is not just a bad headache.

Migraine is a whole collection of often debilitating symptoms which makes it difficult to function and think straight. Migraines can strike anytime, and some people get them weekly (or even daily).

Take the time to understand their symptoms, triggers and early warning signs that a migraine is on the way.

