



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Migraine

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

The Balance Centre

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Tel: 01904 725611

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What is Migraine?

Migraine is a complex condition involving the blood supply to parts of the brain and inner ear.

Most people think of migraine as a severe headache with nausea and visual disturbance but there are many different types of migraine and often the balance system is affected resulting in dizziness, spinning and imbalance, known as vestibular migraine.

Symptoms can be spontaneous, related to position or due to head-motion intolerance as well as being triggered by visual stimulus. How long these symptoms last can vary from very fleeting to hours. Sometimes such symptoms occur before the headache and often they occur without a headache.

Migraine is a very common disorder affecting fifteen percent of the population and can occur at any age. Often there is a genetic predisposition to migraine. Migraine appears to be most troublesome in people's working years. Women are four times more likely than men to suffer.

What Causes Migraine?

There is no known specific cause but there are many factors which can trigger a migraine in an individual who is already predisposed to the condition.

The most potent triggers are:

- Stress
- Hunger and Irregular meal times
- Poor sleep pattern
- Not drinking enough water

Most migraine sufferers think of food as being a common trigger for their attacks. It is now considered that food alone rarely triggers an attack but in certain individuals specific food may lower their threshold for an attack. Some of these foods include: caffeine, fatty or fried food, nuts, cheese, marinated, pickled or cured food, alcohol, chocolate, monosodium glutamate and citrus fruit.

Identifying what triggers your migraine is very helpful but quite difficult to do! The best way is to keep a diary.

Management of Migraine

The most effective way to treat your migraine is to take a holistic approach which involves:

1. Identifying trigger factors where possible.
2. Making changes to your lifestyle and diet.
3. Take any medication that is prescribed.
4. Vestibular rehabilitation may sometimes be appropriate depending on your pattern and type of symptoms.

It is possible to successfully manage many migraines by lifestyle changes alone but for others medication is needed. Often this is a short course, usually a minimum of three months, but for some individuals long term prophylaxis (prevention) is required. The aim of the preventative medication is to reduce the frequency of the migraine episodes.

If you get a migraine attack sometimes it is best to 'sleep it off'. Sleep or complete rest may be a way of aborting a migraine. If you have been prescribed medication to take preventively or during a migraine attack it is important to take it as directed by your doctor.

Lifestyle Changes

Top Tips

- Eat regularly and avoid sugary snacks. Eat every four to six hours during the day.
- Start the day with a cereal based breakfast.
- Drink one to two litres of water each day, more in hot weather or if you are very active.
- Reduce your intake of caffeine, alcohol and fizzy drinks.
- Maintain a regular sleep pattern.
- Get some fresh air and exercise every day. Join an exercise class or play sport if possible.
- Practice relaxation techniques and control stress factors where possible.
- Certain foods described earlier may make you more susceptible to a migraine.
- Keep a diary to identify trigger factors.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

The Specialist Physiotherapists, Balance Centre,
The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE,
telephone 01904 725611.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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