



# spotlight on health

## Help For Headaches

(NAPSA)—More than 50 percent of people who suffer from migraine headaches have never been diagnosed, according to a survey conducted by the National Headache Foundation. Migraines, which affect one person in every four households, are thought to be more common than asthma, diabetes or coronary heart disease.

Given the prevalence of migraine and the pain associated with the condition, it should be no surprise that it has a dramatic impact socially and professionally. In fact, nearly 50 percent of migraine sufferers feel that their condition negatively affects their family and social activities.

The pain associated with migraines also increases health care costs. In terms of employment, migraines cost \$13 billion per year due to lost work and decreased productivity, and an estimated 157 million sick days are attributed to pain and associated symptoms of migraine.

Migraines can be a chronic condition. Attacks can occur one to two times per month and can last from four to 72 hours. When experiencing a migraine, people typically feel intense, throbbing pain that is usually localized to one side of the head. The sufferer also may experience nausea or vomiting and sensitivity to light or sound. Up to 25 percent of people who suffer from migraines experience an “aura,” which has symptoms consisting of light flashes, vision loss and numbness prior to the attack.

While migraines can be chronic disabling conditions, there is hope

### Potential migraine triggers:

- Stress
- Fatigue
- Oversleeping or lack of sleep
- Hormonal changes
- Caffeine or chocolate
- Alcohol
- Changes in barometric pressure/altitude
- Foods or medications that affect blood vessels



and no one should live without treatment. The standard treatments for migraine pain are usually categorized into two classes—abortive and preventive.

Abortive treatments are taken immediately after or at the time a migraine occurs and may help to reduce the severity and length of the attack. Abortive treatments for migraines include non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, as well as ergotamines, glucocorticoids and the newer triptan medications.

Preventive treatments are taken on a daily basis and may reduce the frequency of attacks in people who suffer more than two attacks per month. These medications include antidepressants, beta-blockers and calcium channel blockers. Many of the mentioned medications are only available with a prescription, and a physician should be consulted.

Opioid analgesics are sometimes used in cases of severe, treatment-resistant, chronic daily headache. Opioid analgesics bind to receptors that mediate pain.

Immediate-release forms of opioids are used to stop severe headache episodes. Controlled-release forms are used to suppress chronic daily headache pain that does not respond to conventional preventative therapies such as beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers or anticonvulsants.

The most serious risk associated with opioids is respiratory depression. Common opioid side effects are constipation, nausea, sedation, dizziness, itchiness, vomiting, headache, dry mouth, sweating and weakness. There is a risk of abuse or addiction with opioid analgesics. In properly managed patients with pain, this risk has been reported to be rare. However, data are not available which shows the exact incidence of addiction in chronic pain patients. People with a history of drug abuse may be at a higher risk of developing abuse or addiction to opioids.

Other nondrug preventive measures include lifestyle modifications to reduce various factors that may contribute to migraine attacks, often called “triggers.” These modifications may include changing your diet to avoid certain foods, maintaining a regular exercise schedule, as well as reducing work and personal stress.

For additional information about pain management, consult with your doctor or a pain specialist. Also, the Partners Against Pain® Web site, which can be accessed via [www.partnersagainstpain.com](http://www.partnersagainstpain.com), is a valuable resource for pain management information.