



migraines

Do you have them?

clues to watch for

A migraine is no everyday headache—what makes it different, and so horrendous, is that you don't just have head pain. The major symptoms are nausea, dizziness and vomiting. Throbbing in your ear, jaw or around your eye; sensitivity to light and sound; a runny or stuffy nose and watery eyes are often part of the deal. You may also get what experts call an aura (a visual disturbance that includes seeing flashing lights or temporarily losing sight) 10 to 30 minutes before the headache sets in.

the triggers

Doctors aren't exactly sure what causes migraines, but lots of things can bring them on, including too little sleep, stress and changes in the weather. Certain foods such as red wine and aged cheeses are also triggers, possibly because they contain tyramine, a substance that forms in foods as they age. Hormonal changes in your menstrual cycle can also play a role: Women who get migraines tend to have them around ovulation or a few days before their periods.

how to get relief

See a doctor if you're having headaches more than once a week (even if you don't think they're migraines) or if you've tried OTC treatments like Advil, Tylenol or Excedrin (a combination of

did you know?

- Migraines are most common in people ages 20 to 45.
- Women are three times more likely than men to get them.
- Using OTC pain relievers (and certain prescription ones, too) can often lead to rebound headaches: Your body gets so used to the drugs that missing a dose brings on a new headache.

aspirin, caffeine and acetaminophen) and they're not working. Your doctor may prescribe a triptan medication such as Imitrex, which you take at the first sign of pain to calm nerve endings in the brain. If the headaches happen often and are very debilitating—say, they're causing you to miss a lot of work—you may also need a preventive medication (such as a seizure drug like Topamax or an antidepressant like Elavil) to reduce the frequency and severity of your attacks.

Other options that may help include Botox injections near your eyebrows, the sides of your head or in your neck (they may stop the pain message from reaching your brain); biofeedback, which teaches you to tune into unconscious migraine-causing body processes like muscle tension and change them; and regular exercise.

To learn more about migraines, visit headaches.org or migraineresearchfoundation.org **wd**

“Keeping a diary of when you get headaches can help you figure out what your triggers are and what you can do to feel better.”

Barbara Scherokman, MD, neurologist at the Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic Medical Group in Fairfax, Virginia