

Talking To Your Doctor About Migraine

Your head hurts constantly. You can't explain the accompanying symptoms. If you've experienced any of those situations, it's time for you to talk to your healthcare provider. This guide will help you start the conversation with your doctor so that you receive the care you deserve.



Set Goals for Your Appointment

Starting your appointment by sharing your goals is the best way to set yourself up for a successful conversation. Think about what you want to walk away with—whether it's a treatment plan or simply a better understanding of your condition—and jot it down in the space below.

“I’d like to walk away from today’s appointment with...”

WRITE YOUR GOALS

Make Migraine Part of the Conversation

Sometimes, a doctor's appointment comes and goes, and you feel like your questions haven't been answered. Remember the goal of your appointment and feel confident in asking questions.

- “Given what I am experiencing, I feel I might have migraine—what do you think?”
- “What symptoms or signs would you look for to determine if you think migraine is a possible diagnosis?”

Tip: Try to keep your goals focused

Remember, it takes time for you to understand your symptoms, and for your healthcare provider to give you an accurate diagnosis of migraine and get you on the right treatment plan.

Provide Your Medical History

Providing your medical history will give your physician helpful background as they look to determine the best course of treatment.

MEDICAL HISTORY

What other medical conditions do you have?

What medications are you taking right now?

Have you had any brain, neck or back surgeries in the past?

What medicines—both over-the-counter and prescription—have you taken for your headache in the past?

- At what dose?
- For how long?
- Why did you stop taking them?
(e.g. side effects, stopped working)

Does anyone else in your family get headaches?

- How frequent are their headaches?

RED FLAGS

Please tell your doctor if you've experienced any of these headache red flags:

- Fever
- Weight loss
- Double vision
- Aura*
- Loss of vision
- Sudden severe headache that peaks within 60 seconds (thunderclap)
- Headache that is worse after standing
- Headache that has gotten progressively worse over the past few weeks or month
- New type of headache
- Headache during pregnancy

*Aura is a series of sensory disturbances. They can include seeing sparks and bright dots, tingling on one side of the body and an inability to speak clearly.

Tip: Do You Have a Comorbidity?

Comorbidity is defined as the presence of two or more chronic medical conditions that occur together at a greater-than-coincidental rate than what appears in the general population. Common migraine comorbidities include anxiety, depression, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic neck/low back pain, and fibromyalgia.



Tip: Ask Your Pharmacist!

If you can't remember all the details about the prescription medicines you've tried, ask your pharmacist to print out your prescription history.

Tip: Talking to Your Family

Migraine is genetic, so it's important to ask your immediate family about their headache history.

Tip: Keep a Headache Journal

A headache journal can help track this information and prepare you for answering questions about your symptoms. A journal can be as simple or as detailed as you like, so find a method that works for you.

Click here for some resources:

[MIDAS link](#)

[Headache Journal Article](#)

Provide Your Headache History

Medical Records

If you've been seen by other doctors previously, ask for your medical records to be sent to your new doctor ahead of your appointment. Also, get copies of any brain or neck radiology images you've had taken.

A thorough headache history is the most valuable information you can give your doctor. Sharing details about your headache symptoms will help lead to the appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

LEVELS OF HEADACHE



Mild Headache
Able to do most things without difficulty



Moderate Headache
Able to do some things but function is impaired



Severe Headache
You're unable to function

HEADACHE 101

How many days per month do you experience headache?

Where is the pain located?

What symptoms do you experience before and during a headache?

When do you get headaches? Are they early in the morning or at the end of the day?

How long does the pain last with medication and without medication?

How intense is the pain?

How have your headaches changed over the past 3-6 months?

What factors (e.g. food, stress, light, high altitude, lack of sleep, etc.) seem to trigger your headaches?

Tip: Paint a Picture of Your Headache

Describe your headache using as much imagery and detail as possible. Here are some common and useful words to describe migraine: Sharp, dull, throbbing, pressure and burning.

Tip: Common Migraine Triggers

Stress, changes in sleep patterns, alcohol, changes in weather, dehydration, bright light and strong smells.



Tip: Tell a Story

Open communication is essential to building a strong relationship with your doctor. Telling them how migraine affects your life helps them understand what kind of treatment could work for you.

Tell your doctor if...

- Migraine affects your ability to hold down a job
- Avoiding your triggers had limited how you live your life
- You get anxious about your next migraine attack

AMERICAN  MIGRAINE
FOUNDATION

The mission of the American Migraine Foundation is to mobilize a community for patient support and advocacy, as well as drive and support impactful research that translates into advances for patients with migraine and other disabling diseases that cause severe head pain. Visit americanmigrainefoundation.org for more resources for people living with migraine and their supporters.

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