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Migraines –More Than Your Typical Headache

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Although they often resemble other types of headaches, migraines exist in a class of their own. The World Health Organization ranks migraine headaches at 19 on its list of health conditions causing disability.¹

Anyone experiencing migraines on a regular basis would confirm how disabling these headaches are.² Most often, the typical migraine sufferer finds a dark, quiet room and rests there until the pain subsides.

What Is a Migraine, and What Causes It?

Migraines differ from other headaches because they occur in phases. And the painful phase of the migraine is almost always associated with other bodily symptoms.

The specific causes of migraines remain elusive. It's believed vascular changes in the brain are responsible for the pain. Researchers have noted that certain people experience blood vessel contractions and dilations in the brain just prior to a migraine occurring.

Because these contractions and dilations can be influenced by neurological or hormonal factors, experts are investigating these areas for potential solutions to migraines.

Common triggers for migraine headaches include:

- Stress
- Lack of sleep
- Changes in weather
- Environmental chemicals
- Liver problems
- Rapid change in hormone levels
- Dental pain
- Certain foods (cured meats, red wine, onion, eggs, nuts and cheese)
- Medical conditions (depression, severe hypertension)
- Medications

The Phases of a Migraine

There are four phases involved with migraines: prodrome, aura, headache, and postdrome² Although not all migraines involve all four phases, most patients experience a combination of these symptoms.



QUESTION:

What is the correct order of the four migraine phases?

- A) Postdrome, headache, aura, prodrome
- B) Prodrome, postdrome, aura, headache
- C) Aura, headache, prodrome, postdrome
- D) Prodrome, aura, headache, postdrome

Answer:

D) Prodrome, aura, headache, postdrome

TRUE OR FALSE:

Migraines are always associated with an aura

False – only 20% of migraines include an aura phase

TRUE OR FALSE:

Only medication provides migraine pain relief

False – Many migraine sufferers find relief with chiropractic care

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Prodrome and Aura

Most migraines are preceded by a specific phase called the prodrome, and it may occur hours or days before the actual headache. During this phase, sufferers may experience depression, food cravings, neck stiffness, nausea, hyperactivity or fatigue.

The next of the four phases is the aura. This is a collection of neurological symptoms that usually involve a person's visual experience (e.g. flashing or wavy lights). Other symptoms of an aura may include things like strange smells, tingling sensations and cognitive difficulties. According to one medical expert, only about 20% of patients with migraines experience an aura, and it's likely to occur shortly before the onset of the headache.³

The prodromal and the aura phases warn a person that a migraine is on the way. By taking action during these earlier phases, a migraine sufferer may be able to avoid the more painful stages of this type of headache.

Headache

The main characteristics of the headache phase are...

- Moderate to intense pain with a pulsating quality that lasts 4 to 72 hours. It may be aggravated by bright light or loud noise.
- Nausea and vomiting
- Depression and severe anxiety
- Hot flashes and chills
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Dehydration or fluid retention

Postdrome

At this phase the pain has subsided. But most sufferers will tell you the migraine episode is definitely not over. The postdrome phase may take hours or days to complete. During this time, a migraine sufferer may experience...

- Low mood, especially depression
- Feelings of euphoria and well being
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration and comprehension



How Do You Treat a Migraine?

For most people who experience recurring migraines, the best option is to find a dark, quiet place, and focus on relaxing. Migraines respond well to peace and quiet.

For those who can't endure the painful stages of a migraine, they may require migraine specific medications such as NSAIDs, Triptans or Ergot.

Many studies show chiropractic as a very effective tool used to treat migraine headaches.⁴⁻⁵ Sometimes chiropractic treatments result in instant and significant relief, but most cases require ongoing care to manage painful episodes.

Quote to Inspire

"There is a vast difference between treating effects and adjusting the cause."

- D.D. Palmer, DC

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