

Migraine Headaches



Overview

A migraine is an intense, throbbing headache that may be accompanied by nausea or dizziness. A migraine can last from hours to days.

Causes

Much about migraines isn't understood. Many researchers believe that a migraine can be caused by a change in hormone levels in the brain. Migraines can be triggered by stress, bright lights and certain smells. They can also be caused by medications, and by getting too little or too much sleep. Certain foods may trigger migraines. These include alcohol, aged cheeses, chocolate, and foods containing aspartame or MSG (monosodium glutamate).

Symptoms

A typical migraine results in moderate to severe pain. This pain is often felt on only one side of the head. The pain may interfere with a person's activities. Symptoms may also include nausea and sensitivity to light and sound. Some people see sparkling flashes of light, spots, or dazzling lines before a migraine. These are called "visual auras."

Treatment

Migraines may be treated with pain-relieving medications and with rest in a darkened room. People who experience migraines regularly may also take medications such as beta blockers or antihistamines. These can reduce the frequency and severity of the headaches.

