

---

## PATIENT INFORMATION ON MIGRAINES

---



### Understanding Migraine

Migraine is a common condition affecting around 1 in 7 people in the UK. It's more than just a headache—it can cause significant pain, sensitivity to light and sound, nausea, and more. Migraines are typically episodic (less than 15 days per month) or chronic (15 or more days per month). While the exact cause isn't fully understood, genetic factors and lifestyle triggers can play a role.

### Symptoms of Migraine

A migraine episode usually progresses through several phases:

1. Prodrome: Mood changes, food cravings, neck stiffness, and fatigue may occur hours or days before the headache.
2. Aura (not always present): Visual disturbances like flashing lights, tingling, and difficulty speaking.
3. Headache: Intense pain, often on one side of the head, which can last hours to days.
4. Postdrome: Following the headache, patients may feel drained and fatigued.

Migraine triggers can include stress, certain foods, hormonal changes, dehydration, and irregular sleep patterns.

## When to Seek Help

Most migraines can be managed at home with lifestyle changes and medications, but seek medical attention if:

- You experience a sudden, severe headache ("thunderclap headache").
- There are neurological symptoms like weakness or vision loss.
- You have new headache patterns after age 50.
- Headaches follow head injury, especially with confusion or vomiting.

## Red Flags

Certain symptoms, known as "red flags," indicate a need for urgent evaluation, such as:

- Persistent or worsening pain.
- Sudden headache onset with fever, rash, or neck stiffness.

## Self-Management and Lifestyle Adjustments

Lifestyle changes are often the first step in managing migraines:

- Regular sleep: Aim for consistent sleep and wake times.
- Stay hydrated: Aim for at least 2 litres of water daily.
- Avoid triggers: Reduce caffeine, limit alcohol, and avoid skipping meals.
- Stress management: Techniques like relaxation exercises or yoga may reduce episodes.

A headache diary can help you track potential triggers and assess the effectiveness of treatments.

## Treatment Options

### Acute Treatment

If a migraine attack begins, the following treatments may help:

- Over-the-counter pain relief: Soluble paracetamol or ibuprofen can be effective if taken early in the attack. Avoid using codeine-based drugs.
- Triptans: Medications like sumatriptan can relieve symptoms. These require a prescription and should be used as directed.
- Anti-nausea medication: Options like domperidone may help if nausea is a symptom.

## Preventive Treatments

Preventive treatments may be recommended if migraines are frequent or disabling:

- Lifestyle changes: Reducing caffeine and avoiding painkillers where possible.
- Medication: Preventive medications include blood pressure drugs like propranolol, anticonvulsants like topiramate, or low-dose amitriptyline. Your doctor will guide the most suitable option.
- Nerve stimulators and injection therapy: For chronic migraines, devices like Cefaly may provide relief.

## Alternative Therapies

While there is limited evidence supporting dietary changes for migraines, a well-balanced diet without artificial additives may help some. **Acupuncture** is also an option recommended by NICE for frequent migraines.

## Useful Resources

- The Migraine Trust: [www.migrainetrust.org](http://www.migrainetrust.org)
- Migraine Action: [www.migraine.org.uk](http://www.migraine.org.uk)

For any concerns, consult your local pharmacist or GP, especially if your symptoms change or worsen.

### ***If you have further questions:***

Call the **practice** on *01285 653184 or 01285 653122*

If you require **urgent** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*

In an **emergency** call **999**