

Migraine Information Sheet

A migraine is a severe, throbbing headache that may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting and extreme sensitivity to light and sound. Some migraines are preceded or accompanied by a sensory warning symptom (aura), such as flashes of light, blind spots or tingling in an arm or leg. After a migraine, some people feel drained, while others report feeling mildly elated.

Migraines affect about 2 percent of children by age 7 and about 7 to 10 percent of children and adolescents by age 15. (Migraines in Children and Adolescents, 2009.) As children increase in age, more girls than boys develop these headaches.

Genetics and environmental factors appear to play a role in migraines. Common migraine triggers may include some foods, skipping meals, food additives, highly caffeinated beverages, stress, bright lights, sun glare, missing sleep, too much sleep and a change of weather or barometric pressure.

When untreated, a migraine usually lasts from four to 72 hours, but the frequency with which headaches occur varies from person to person. Some people have migraines several times a month while others have them much less often.

Symptoms

- Pain on one side or both sides of the head.
- Pain that has a pulsating, throbbing quality.
- Sensitivity to light, sounds or smells.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Blurred vision.
- Lightheadedness, sometimes followed by fainting.

Treatment

Treatment can include both relief of the symptoms and the prevention of future headaches. In addition to medications, relaxation training, biofeedback training and cognitive behavioral therapy prove helpful for some. Identifying and avoiding triggers, as well as learning simple biofeedback techniques, alleviate symptoms for a number of people.

Educational Implications

Children with migraines may be absent from school frequently which can affect their academic performance. Students may also have difficulty concentrating and attending in class due to discomfort. Time resting in the health office might lessen the discomfort.

Educational Options

Those students whose migraine headaches adversely affect their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories. IDEA entitles a student with a disability to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.