

Can Your Child Help You Manage Migraines? Understanding Empathy's Impact on Pain Management

Coping gets easier when you're receptive.

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This article is about empathy and migraine management. Here, you'll learn about the empathetic approaches your children may take that will improve your ability to cope with migraines. You'll learn when empathy begins, and what it looks like, while examining how your kids can help you manage, provided you're a willing recipient of feedback.



We all have headaches. But we're not always aware how our family members perceive pain. We may often believe they couldn't understand. These beliefs shut us off to appreciating our loved one's efforts.

The time to change can start today—before your next headache. If you're ready to embrace a new pain management strategy, chances are, you're tired of feeling sick and unsupported.

If that's true, during your next migraine, you'll have already opened your mind.

Today, you're thinking has probably changed. You arrive home from work, settle down on the couch. Then, the migraine strikes. You shut your eyes and gently massage your temples. The throbbing, now excruciating, sends you racing to the toilet.

Then, piercing light. You unleash a silenced scream. Why, after years, haven't you found a way to stop it?

Then, suddenly, you hear your children playing upstairs. You can't help but wonder, what if you invited them closer? Not simply sitting side-by-side, but intimately inviting them into the depth of your pain—while helping them realize your appreciation for trying.

You're not alone if you feel this way. Women, especially, crave emotional support. Men prefer to believe their strength is noticeable. Children help you manage pain, too. All they need to do is be themselves. Within this insight is reasoning that supports their ability to assist. Through empathy-building activities, such as bonding or deep conversation, your ability to bond with your children while in pain will become a more rewarding process.

As it turns out, new research is here to explain why.



Childhood empathy and migraine management

Most children show empathy between 2 and 4. Here, expression is limited. Empathy [researchers](#) say kids tend to stare at their peers when they see them in pain, but not to comfort them--simply because they understand something is wrong. The shared feelings are there, even if barely present, while the ability to identify pain in others, is much more apparent. This is because children can experience cognitive empathy, the ability to logically understand emotions without feeling.

Cognitive empathy is why your child will understand your sad if you're crying. They understand the pain you're experiencing because of facial expressions you've shown them. Over time, children associate expressions with emotion, especially when accompanied by speech, such as when you say, "Ouch!", or behaviors, such as when you withdraw to your bedroom to manage pain alone. As such, children play an integral role in pain management. There are many ways your kids may show empathy when you're experiencing a migraine:

- They may ask if you're okay
- They may ask whether you need something
- They may ask how to help
- They may offer warm smiles or hugs.
- They may offer a toy

A child who attempts to help reduce your migraine pain through empathic gestures will improve your ability to tolerate the pain. This increased tolerance occurs due to a concept known as [empathy for pain](#), which has been seen to help nurses in clinical settings. Outside the clinicians' office, empathy for pain is equally as impactful due to the forming of a pain-alleviating bond that forms when someone in pain is supported by another.

With this bond, you'll be in a position to better manage migraines. First, it's important to have a complete understanding of the condition.

Managing migraines starts with understanding the condition

Migraines are a kind of neurological disorder that's typically thought of as the worst kind of headache. You'll usually feel a throbbing pain in your temples or ears. Migraines may also cause pain in your eyes or forehead. Often, migraines are accompanied by nausea, as well as sensitivity to both light and sound. They may occur frequently, stick around, or come and go periodically. But without question, these headaches are among the most uncomfortable experiences you'll have.

Migraines are classified under four separate subtypes. They include:

- Migraine without aura
- Migraine with aura
- Chronic migraines
- Episodic migraine

The first subtype refers to frequent migraines that last between 4 and 72 hours. The second refers to migraine pain that's followed by speech or sensory problems. The third, chronic migraine, refers to migraines that occur more than 15 days a month. For chronic migraines, you'll have the migraine for a period of three months or longer.

If none of these migraines sound painful, the fourth subtype, episodic migraine, refers to migraines that occur with stomach distress. These migraines last for 14 or fewer days a month.

With the different subtypes of migraines out there, you'd think all the information out there would mean everyone's getting help. Contrarily, the burden migraines cause is becoming increasingly devastating. The number of cases has increased from 732.56 million to 1.16 billion between 1990 and 2021. And yet, the causes of migraines remain complex and diverse.

Let's take a closer look at what's triggering people's migraines.

What causes migraines?

It's the causes of migraines that make these headaches difficult to treat. Any experience requiring an adjustment may cause a migraine, including:

- Stress
- Severe weather
- Travel
- Overexertion
- Diet changes
- Hormonal changes
- Changes in sleep patterns

The number of events that require adjustment may cause you to continue having migraines. They're also why migraine sufferers become disabled. Among surveyed adults who reported migraines, 42.4% experienced at least moderate disability, meaning they faced difficulties sustaining workdays, or they had trouble meeting responsibilities. The discomfort makes all aspects of work functioning a challenge.

Still, migraines are treatable, and many treatments have helped migraine sufferers manage pain and live well.

How are migraines treated?

Treatments range from prescription medicines to over-the-counter drugs or injectables.

You may have heard of these treatments, such as taking Excedrin, which contains caffeine, and adding extra caffeine, or trying over-the-counter drugs like Naproxen or Aspirin, which are cheaper than prescription medications like Sumatriptan or Nurtec.

Also, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), particularly, Ibuprofen and Naproxen, are effective choices.

However, migraines can be treatment-resistant. In such cases, anti-CGRP medications work better. These CGRP inhibitors work by targeting calcitonin gene-related peptide receptors found in the central nervous system. CGRP is known to help with pain modulation, and includes prescription injections like Ajovy or Aimovig, which are less likely to cause overuse headaches, while still reducing the frequency and severity of migraines.

Other notable anti-CGRP medications include:

- Emgalipti
- Vyepti
- Ubrelvy
- Qulipta
- Zavzpret

There are plenty of medications to choose from depending on your unique experience with migraines. But navigating the insurance challenges can be difficult. The good news is that as of January 1, 2025, if you're on Medicare Part D, your yearly out-of-pocket cost for these covered medications is capped at \$2,000 a year. In addition, that price is spread out over the course of 12 months. The changes mean more people can access high-priced migraine medications, which may cost \$1,000 or more.

Still, not everyone can navigate the complexity of treatment. Some will want to find more natural choices. Others will want to take medication combined with at-home treatment that's available. This is where childhood empathy comes to play.

Often, the way your children respond to your migraines will play a major role in how you manage. Through parental bonding, which occurs in empathy-heavy situations, you'll find greater opportunities

to not only better cope with the pain, but feel better while it's occurring.

Managing migraines using parental bonding—learning to share empathy

Your kids can feel what you're going through. Acknowledging the signs — and reciprocating — will put you one step closer towards managing your migraines through the power of parental bonding. This close attachment increases the power of empathy. It's natural, but can be enhanced when migraines occur.

The reason is because while in pain, you'll feel a tendency to want to be closer to loved ones. Taking advantage of this desire will strengthen parental bonds. It will also demonstrate the importance of exhibiting shared feelings.

When you're having a migraine, there are bond-strengthening approaches you can take, which are critical for coping with the pain these headaches cause.

Agree on quiet time

With migraines, you'll desire solitude. You'll need it. But what you really want is quiet to go with comfort. Inviting your kids to rest peacefully gives you the opportunity to share the power of peace. This gift comes when your children, knowledgeable of your pain, demonstrate empathy by being quiet and still.

Getting this to happen isn't easy, but occurs through gentle guidance and feedback. And studies show that [empathy and appreciation](#) for a loved one's actions, both reduce severe pain, and increase your ability to cope.

Therefore, you should plan on spending your next hours with your children quietly, with neither of you making a sound. For starters, there is evidence that silence helps with pain. Research shows silent-like [meditation](#) affects areas of the brain involved with pain modulation, which reduces both pain

intensity, and unpleasantness related to experiencing the pain. The research means that while you don't necessarily have to meditate, sharing serene, quiet moments with your children, especially where silence is the priority, makes migraine easier to manage, and a lot less painful.

What happens is you're showing pain, first, then you're showing your response, (quiet withdrawal). Over time, expect your young ones to join you without putting up a fuss, provided you can show them appreciation through gratitude or affection.

Listen first, approve second

Young children may not realize that their actions may be more helpful than they think. Even typical activities, like playtime or reading, promote happiness and contentment due to the soothing display of childhood activity.

Letting your kids know they're being helpful is an important step in reinforcing their behavior. Whether they instruct their siblings to remain quiet or help share messages to your spouse when your voice is weak, giving them positive feedback not only ensures these behaviors continue, but you keep benefiting from them as they do.

Start by listening, first—children are often talkative no matter the situation. With a quiet tone encouraged, both of you benefit when you maintain periodic eye contact while offering gentle, affirmative gestures. You might nod at times, smile when you can, or share a warm thank-you, but always ensure you're listening, even if your eyes are closed and you're trying to block out sound, it's important to return some measure of appreciation for your children's words.

Your kids will notice this calm act of effort and reward you with silence and compassion.

Share your coping and resilience strategies

Opening up about how you manage your migraines is a driving force in alleviating pain. Sharing coping techniques helps your children understand your plan. They'll understand, if not right away, then over time as you reciprocate with body language.

The act of discussing coping is a simple social activity that encourages emotional support from your children, an [effect](#) that's helpful even in small doses. While migraine pain may not be immediately reduced, your ability to cope is improved, which increases your ability to manage.

Children play an essential role in helping you manage migraine pain, both through their showing of empathy, which may take time to observe, and through their reactions, which you can encourage with positive feedback. Children who learn that their actions are diminishing adults' pain become increasingly empathetic and affectionate, a result that increases parental bonding.

With medication, empathy will help reduce the pain you're experiencing, causing you to feel happier and calmer in between migraines, and feel stronger when they occur. With time, you'll notice yourself getting closer with your kids, a bond that makes migraines feel bearable, and the time you spend having them feel warmer and more comfortable.

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