



WHAT'S CAUSING YOUR HEADACHE?

With Migraine & Headache Awareness Month approaching, we look at the main triggers behind them – and the best remedies

Headaches can be debilitating, whether they are linked to allergies, hormones, caffeine or hypertension. Perhaps the hardest to cope with are migraines, which cause mild to severe pain, typically affecting one side of the head. They can also impact your vision and make you feel incredibly sick.

Doctor Ross Perry, medical director of Cosmedics skin clinics (cosmedics.co.uk), says, “Migraines are a unique kind of headache, often characterised by pain on one side of the head, nausea, and visual disturbances such as flashing lights or temporary tunnel vision. You may also experience an aura, a sensation indicating that a migraine is about to occur.”

“The exact cause of migraines is unknown, but they’re thought to be triggered by spasms of blood vessels in the brain or neck area. Factors like stress, alcohol and dehydration can exacerbate them, but sometimes they can happen for no apparent reason.”

Doctor Perry explains that preventive treatments are the main approach to managing migraines, with medications available to help prevent their onset.

Migraines may start when young girls get their first period, but they can begin at any time. They can persist throughout the reproductive years and into menopause.

Doctor Ross adds, “Sadly, there’s not much you can do as it’s often down to genetics. However, certain measures can help manage the onset and severity, such as staying hydrated and drinking plenty of fluids.”

“Drinking water and engaging in regular exercise can also help alleviate migraines triggered by hormones. It’s recommended to manage stress levels through breathing exercises or yoga.”

As June marks Migraine & Headache Awareness Month, we ask Mital Thakrar, a pharmacist at Well Pharmacy Online Doctor (onlinedoctor.well.co.uk), to explain how to spot and treat the most common types.

1 TENSION HEADACHES

“These are the most common type and often linked to stress, lack of sleep, or too much caffeine,” says Mital. “You’ll usually feel a dull pressure or tightening on both sides of your head, or even in your neck and face.” Over-the-counter pain relief like paracetamol or ibuprofen is usually helpful. He also advises keeping hydrated and maintaining good posture.

2 CLUSTER HEADACHES

These are excruciating and tend to come on in sudden, intense bursts. The pain is usually focused on one side of the head, often around the eye, temple or forehead. They can last from 15 minutes to a few hours and might happen several times a day. Mital says, “Paracetamol or ibuprofen might not touch this type of pain. I recommend seeing your GP, who may be able to suggest treatments.”

3 SINUS-RELATED PAINS

Caused by inflammation or an infection in the sinuses, you’ll feel pressure or pain around cheeks, eyes or forehead, often with a blocked nose or fever. They’re often mistaken for migraines, but do not typically come with the nausea and light sensitivity. Mital says, “Effective options include decongestants and saline sprays or a warm compress.”

4 MIGRAINES

“Migraines tend to feel more intense than other headaches, often affecting one side of the head with throbbing pain,” Mital says. “Some people also experience an aura – flashing lights, blind spots or tingling before the headache starts.” Over-the-counter pain relief and anti-nausea medication can help, but some people may need prescription options. He notes, “Keeping a migraine diary can be really helpful in identifying triggers, such as foods.”

5 HEATWAVE HEADACHES

Headaches can be brought on by dehydration or heat exhaustion. If you are sweating, you will quickly become dehydrated, which can trigger headaches. Mital adds, “Similarly, if you are exposed to high temperatures for a long time, you may experience heat exhaustion, which can cause a headache as well as dizziness and fatigue.” Drink plenty of water and seek shade to minimise exposure to direct sunlight.

‘BOTOX HAS HELPED MANAGE MY MIGRAINES’



Suzi Brown, 46, from Manchester, is a web developer

“I started suffering from migraines around puberty. I remember telling my mum my head felt really heavy when I was about nine years old. For me, they feel like a vice is crushing my head, and I feel sick and dizzy at the same time. I get brain fog and memory loss, both during and after.”

“The worst thing is not being able to plan – they happen without warning. I missed a festival last year because I had to leave early. Alcohol makes them worse, too. I’ve even had to miss family holidays abroad.”

“I missed tons of work before I was self-employed, and people made comments that I was lying because it’s not a disability that can be seen – although you can see when I have one, as my face and eyes are really puffy.”

“It’s much easier now I’m self-employed. In fact, it’s one of the reasons I work for myself. If I do have to take time off, I can make up the hours, and I’m in control of my workload.”

“If I catch migraines early, they can last a few hours. I take meds during the night if I feel one

coming, and they’re usually gone by morning. If I don’t, they can last a few days or even a week.”

“To manage them, I now get Botox which takes away about 80% of the migraines. I don’t know how it works, but I’m thankful it does. I get some Botox on the NHS, so although it’s meant to be every three to six months, it’s nearer to every year due to waiting lists. So I top this up privately when I can. The doctor has added the sides of the head and, last time, the forehead. The latter hasn’t worked, but it did wonders for my wrinkles!”