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## The Different Types of Migraine

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As anyone who suffers from migraines knows, these disabling headaches belong in a category of their own. Migraine is a common primary headache disorder – in fact, migraine was ranked 19th among all diseases world wide causing disability by the World Health Organization (WHO).



But did you know that while migraines share certain features, they can occur in many different forms? There are even migraines that don't cause pain in the head. In considering some of the various types of migraine, it is important to remember that some people may be affected by more than one form.

So how can you tell if you have a migraines or a regular headache? Migraines occur repeatedly; they are often triggered by specific things; and they often cause nausea, vomiting, light sensitivity, and/or occur after an aura (disturbed vision, numbness or tingling). For more information on migraine versus tension and other types of headache, read our previous article [Headache vs. Migraine](#).

### Migraine classification

Generally, all migraine headaches are classified as being with aura or without aura. There are many variations of migraine within these two main categories. Some people may also have specific symptoms before and after a migraine occurs.

### Before and after a migraine

Some migraine sufferers experience an early (premonitory) stage several hours or days before either an aura or migraine without aura occurs. Some may also experience a headache resolution phase after the headache goes away. During these periods, symptoms include an increase or decrease in energy, depression, cravings for particular foods and repeated yawning. Other symptoms that may indicate an oncoming migraine headache or aura include difficulty concentrating, neck stiffness, sensitivity to light or sound, nausea, blurred vision, yawning and paleness.

### What is an aura?

An aura is a neurological phenomenon that generally develops 10 to 30 minutes before the headache. Auras may involve visual effects including seeing bright shimmering lights around

objects or at the edges of the field of vision, zigzag lines, castles, wavy images or hallucinations. Some people may experience temporary vision loss. Auras may include non-visual symptoms such as muscle weakness, speech or language abnormalities, dizziness, vertigo (spinning sensation), and tingling or numbness of the face, tongue or extremities. An aura typically occurs in association with a migraine; however, it may also occur with non-migraine headaches, or without any headache.

## Types of migraine

Migraine without aura is the most common form of migraine; it is also known as common migraine. These headaches involve recurrent attacks lasting 4 to 72 hours, with at least 2 of the following 4 characteristics:

- One-sided (unilateral)
- Pulsating or throbbing
- Moderate to severe intensity
- Aggravated by routine physical activity (eg, climbing stairs)

Nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light or sound often accompany migraine without aura.

## What to know about common migraine (migraine without aura)

- Migraine without aura is more likely to affect both sides of the head in children, whereas it is more likely to be one-sided in adults.
- Migraine without aura is the most common type of migraine; attacks tend to be more disabling than migraines that occur with aura.
- These migraines are most likely to worsen with frequent use of pain medications.

Migraine with aura affects about one in three people with migraine, and attacks are recurrent. They are preceded by aura symptoms that develop gradually over 5-20 minutes and last less than 60 minutes. A migraine headache without aura follows, or less often is absent altogether.

Chronic migraine refers to repeated migraine attacks (either with or without an aura) that occur for more than 15 days per month over a period of more than 3 months.

Medication-overuse headache (or "rebound" headache) occurs in response to overuse of pain medications; this type of recurrent headache must be ruled out for a diagnosis of chronic migraine.

## Menstrual migraines

Women suffer migraines three times more frequently than men do, and menstrual migraines affect 60 percent of these women. Menstrual migraines are primarily caused by changes in female sex hormones estrogen and progesterone, which fluctuate during the menstrual cycle. Menstrual migraines typically occur before, during or immediately after the period, or during ovulation. Because oral contraceptives influence estrogen levels, women on birth control pills may experience more menstrual migraines.

The menstrual migraine's symptoms are similar to migraine without aura. It begins as a one-sided, throbbing headache accompanied by nausea, vomiting or sensitivity to bright lights and sounds. An aura may precede the menstrual migraine.

## Watch for food triggers

An estimated 30% of migraine headaches are related to certain foods or food additives.

Common culprits include foods that contain:

- Nitrates and nitrites (usually in processed meats)
- Yellow (annatto) food coloring
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG) (in canned or processed foods, Chinese foods, tenderizer, and seasonings such as soy sauce)
- Tyramine (found in many foods including red wines and most alcoholic beverages; aged cheeses and processed meats; chicken livers; broad beans, peas, lentils)

## Rare types of migraine

There are many relatively rare types of migraine with aura; just a few are described here.

Familial hemiplegic migraine involves muscle weakness, and is diagnosed based on the presence of at least one 1st or 2nd degree relative with migraine with aura that includes muscle weakness.

Sporadic hemiplegic migraine also involves muscle weakness, but differs from the familial type in that it affects someone who has no relatives affected by migraine or aura.

Basilar-type migraine originates from the brain stem and /or both hemispheres (sides) of the brain, and is associated with throbbing at the back of the head. The aura affects both eyes. Symptoms may include severe headache, dizziness, ringing in the ears, double vision, slurred speech, and poor coordination. There is no muscle weakness. This very rare type of migraine is typically seen in young, usually female, adults.

Abdominal migraine generally affects children with a family history of migraine. It occurs as episodes of abdominal pain without a gastrointestinal cause. It may be experienced as a generalized soreness in the stomach or pain around the midline or navel area. Pain may be moderate to severe. Attacks may last from 1 to 72 hours with return to normality in between. Abdominal migraine includes at least two of the following: loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and paleness. Most children who experience abdominal migraine will develop migraine headache later in life.

## What's your migraine type?

Tracking the patterns and possible triggers of your migraine headaches can help your doctor identify the type(s) of migraine affecting you and that may improve your overall treatment. [Learn more here.](#)

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