

Signs of a migraine

There are several types of so-called primary headaches. Primary headaches are headaches that happen on their own: they are not caused by something else, such as an illness or hitting your head. The major types of primary headache are:

Tension-type headache:

- The pain feels like pressing or tightening and it is on both sides of the head.
- The pain is light to moderate.
- The headaches last from 30 minutes to several days.
- They do not generally happen more than once a month.
- The headache does not cause nausea, although it might cause sensitivity to light.
- Physical activity does not make the headache worse.
- This is the most common type of headache. People who get migraines might get these as well.

Cluster headache:

- Searing or piercing pain around the eye on one side of the head - usually the same side of the head.
- The pain is severe.
- The headaches last from 15 minutes to 3 hours.
- They happen very often: every second day, usually several times a day.
- As well as the pain inside the head, it can cause a blocked nose, watery eyes and other nose and eye symptoms.
- Cluster headaches are not common, and men are more likely than women to have them.

Migraine:

- A migraine attack is associated with an intense pulsing, pounding or throbbing pain, concentrating at the front of the head and usually on one side - but it is not always the same side.
- The pain is moderate to severe.
- In teenagers and adults, the headaches last between at least 4 hours to 3 days. In children they last at least 2 hours and may go away more quickly.
- It has to have happened more than 5 times to be classified as a migraine. They might occur around

menstruation (a woman's periods).

- As well as the pain, a migraine usually causes sensitivity to light and/or sound. Migraines also often cause nausea.
- There may or not be symptoms that are called "auras": these could be flashing lights or other disturbances in vision, for example, and they could happen before or during the migraine. Not all migraines have auras.
- Physical activity usually makes the headache worse.
- They are not as common as tension headaches, but they affect a lot of children and adults. Migraines are more likely to affect women.

A person who has a migraine often has to lie down somewhere dark and quiet and lie down because they cannot bear the light, sounds and movement. That is one of the main differences between migraines and other types of headaches.

Children who are having migraines will usually avoid bright light, and they might be pale, feel nauseous and have to vomit. They might also get abdominal pain that lasts from 1 hour to 3 days - abdominal pain is pain in the lower gut or belly. This is often called "abdominal migraine", although not all doctors and researchers agree that there is a separate type of migraine in children which mostly causes abdominal pain and not headache.

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Sources

The German Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG)

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