

Migraine Facts & Statistics

Backgrounder

Definition

Migraine is a disorder of the central nervous system, yet the exact cause of migraine remains unknown. Migraines are often unpredictable attacks of moderate-to-severe, usually unilateral, pulsating headaches lasting for as long as 2 to 72 hours. Most patients suffer moderate to severe nausea which can lead to vomiting. In fact, 70 per cent of migraine sufferers experience vomiting.¹⁵

Migraine patients can also be affected by sensitivity to light (photophobia), noise (phonophobia) and smell (osmophobia). It is therefore important to find a medication that can take effect in as early as 30 minutes to relieve the pain and associated symptoms, especially nausea. There is wide variation in the severity and frequency of attacks between patients and within an individual over time.

Types of Migraine

- **Without Aura (85 per cent of sufferers)**
Migraine without warning signs or aura.
- **With Aura (15 per cent of sufferers)**
A few hours or a full day before an attack, sufferers experience visual, sensory or motor symptoms, such as flashing lights, zigzag patterns, weakness or numbness.

Symptoms

Common migraine symptoms in adults include:

- Severe to moderate head pain (often unilateral and pulsating).
- Moderate to severe nausea.
- Vomiting.
- Sensitivity to light (photophobia).
- Sensitivity to sound (phonophobia).
- Sensitivity to smell (osmophobia).
- Weakness, numbness on one side, "pins and needles" sensation.

Triggers (vary considerably from one patient to another)

- Food (e.g., red wine, foods containing MSG, foods containing nitrates).
- Hormonal change (particularly high levels of estrogen).
- Stress and/or over exertion.
- Weather (e.g., temperature or barometric changes).
- Sleep disturbances (too much and/or too little sleep).

Prevalence

- Approximately 3.2 million Canadians, or 14 per cent of the population, suffer from migraines.¹
- Migraine headaches affect approximately five per cent of Canadian men and 15 to 17 per cent of Canadian women.²
- Women are twice as likely as men to develop the condition.³
- Although some children and seniors may be prone to frequent attacks, the majority of migraine sufferers are of working age, 25 to 44 years old.⁴
- More than half of all migraine sufferers have a family history of migraine.
- Between 200,000 to 300,000 Canadian children suffer from migraine.⁵
- It is estimated that as many as half of all people with migraine are undiagnosed.⁶
- On average, people with migraine suffer 20 attacks per year.⁷
- Seventy-five per cent of migraine sufferers experience moderate to severe migraine attacks.⁸

Economic Impact

- In Canada, 19 per cent of migraine sufferers require absence from work during an attack. As a result, 5.4 million work days are lost each year due to migraine.⁹
- Migraine is estimated to cost the Canadian economy \$500 million annually in lost productivity and absenteeism.¹⁰
- Seventy-five per cent of all migraine sufferers are unable to carry out day-to-day activities during an attack.¹¹
- More than 80 per cent of migraine sufferers experience some degree of headache-related disability.¹²
- Eighty-one per cent of migraine sufferers have sought medical help for migraine at some time and 14 per cent have used emergency services.¹³

References:

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