Migraine Headache

A migraine headache is an intense, throbbing pain on one or both sides of your head. The exact cause of a migraine headache is not always known. A migraine may be caused when nerves in the brain become irritated and release chemicals that cause swelling (*inflammation*) within blood vessels, causing pain. Many migraine sufferers have a family history of migraines. Before you get a migraine you may or may not get an aura. An aura is a group of symptoms that can predict the beginning of a migraine. An aura may include:

- Visual changes such as:
  - Flashing lights.
  - Seeing bright spots or zig-zag lines.
  - Tunnel vision.
- Feelings of numbness.
- Trouble talking.
- Muscle weakness.

SYMPTOMS OF A MIGRAINE

A migraine headache has one or more of the following symptoms:

- Pain on one or both sides of your head.
- Pain that is pulsating or throbbing in nature.
- Pain that is severe enough to prevent daily activities.
- Pain that is aggravated by any daily physical activity.
- Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), vomiting or both.
- Pain with exposure to bright lights, loud noises or activity.
- General sensitivity to bright lights or loud noises.

MIGRAINE TRIGGERS

A migraine headache can be triggered by many things. Examples of triggers include:

- Alcohol.
- Smoking.
- Stress.
- It may be related to menses (female menstruation).
- Aged cheeses.
- Foods or drinks that contain nitrates, glutamate, aspartame or tyramine.
- Lack of sleep.
- Chocolate.
- Caffeine.
- Hunger.
- Medications such as nitroglycerine (used to treat chest pain), birth control pills, estrogen and some blood pressure medications.

DIAGNOSIS

- A migraine headache is often diagnosed based on:
  - Your symptoms.
  - Physical examination.
  - A CT scan of your head may be ordered to see if your headaches are caused from other medical conditions.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Medications can help prevent migraines if they are recurrent or should they become recurrent. Your caregiver can help you with a medication or treatment program that will be helpful to you.
- If you get a migraine, it may be helpful to lie down in a dark, quiet room.

- It may be helpful to keep a headache diary. This may help you find a trend as to what may be triggering your headaches.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You do not get relief from the medications given to you or you have a recurrence of pain.
- You have confusion, personality changes or seizures.
- You have headaches that wake you from sleep.
- You have an increased frequency in your headaches.
- You have a stiff neck.
- You have a loss of vision.
- You have muscle weakness.
- You start losing your balance or have trouble walking.
- You feel faint or pass out.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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