

Danbury Hospital Patient Education Sheet**What is a Migraine Headache?****What is a migraine?**

A migraine is a very painful headache that is often described as pulsing or throbbing in one area of the head. It may be accompanied by

- sensitivity to light and sound
- nausea
- vomiting.

Some individuals may also experience visual disturbances such as flashing lights, zig-zag lines, or temporary loss of vision. These visual disturbances are referred to as "auras" and usually precede the migraine. The auras are similar to warnings that alert the individual that a migraine "is coming." Migraines may last in duration from a couple of hours to sometimes several days.

Scientists use to believe that migraines were linked to constriction and dilation of blood vessels in the head. More recently, it is believed that migraines are related to inherited genes and brain cell activity.

Are there triggers that bring on migraines?

There are certain triggers that have been found to increase the likelihood of a migraine occurring. Common triggers include:

- Stress and anxiety
- Lack of food and/or sleep
- Exposure to bright lights or light glare
- Hormonal changes in women
- Birth control pills
- Some foods and food additives, such as chocolate, cheeses, monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Smoking or exposure to tobacco smoke

How are migraines treated?

There are two ways that migraines are treated:

1. Taking medications to prevent the attacks, or
2. Taking medications to relieve the symptoms during an attack.

Many people with severe migraines will treat them using both methods. Medications originally developed to treat epilepsy and depression have been proven successful in minimizing migraines. When a migraine does occur, they may take medications called triptans to relieve the pain and other symptoms to improve function. They may also take medications to lessen the effects of nausea and/or vomiting if present. Women may opt to take hormone therapy if their migraines are triggered by hormonal cycles.

The combination of therapies will help most individuals to minimize the number of attacks. For women who have migraines due to hormonal cycles, they often have fewer and more milder attacks after menopause.

In addition to medication therapy, stress management strategies may also be recommended. These include exercise, relaxation, and biofeedback.

What should I expect while in the hospital?

While at Danbury Hospital, if you are not immediately discharged from the Emergency Department, you may go to the Outpatient Observation Unit for extended assessment of your condition. Some patients may also require an inpatient admission. This is based on your individual needs and your physician's assessment.

Along with taking a medical history and conducting a physical assessment, your physician may order diagnostic tests to rule out other illnesses or conditions when diagnosing migraines. This is to determine if your headaches are caused by some other underlying condition.

What diagnostic tests may be ordered?

Your physician may order diagnostic testing to help confirm your condition. This may include:

- Blood work
- A CT scan of the head and neck
- An MRI of the head and neck
- In some cases when an infection is suspected, the physician may order a lumbar puncture.

What treatments will be ordered?

Treatment depends whether or not you have any other condition beside migraines. In addition to medication therapy, your physician may order:

- An intravenous infusion for replacement fluids
- A consult with a neurologist and/or a consult with the anesthesia department for pain management.
- Assessments called "neuro checks" in which the staff will be assessing how your eyes react to light, your level of alertness, your strength and coordination
- A diet if you do not have accompanying nausea and vomiting.

- If your physician suspects an infection that may potentially be contagious, he/she may place you on isolation until it is determined that you are no longer infectious. This means that you will be placed in a private room; and all personnel entering your room, including visitors, will be asked to wear protective outer equipment. This may include a disposable gown, gloves, and sometimes mask.
- When you are ready to return home, your physician and nurse will review with you your discharge instructions and any new prescriptions that you may need to treat your migraines.

At any time during your stay at Danbury Hospital, please feel free to consult with your nurse or physician regarding any questions that you or your family/caregiver may have regarding your treatment, or how we can help you to be more comfortable.

Source:

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. (2008). Migraine information page. Retrieved from www.ninds.nih.gov

U. S. National Library of Medicine/Medline Plus. (2008). Migraine. Retrieved from www.nlm.nih.gov

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