



# Patient Toolkit: Living with Migraine

## What is migraine?

A migraine is a common neurological disease that is often described as an intense pulsing or throbbing pain in one area of the head, usually lasting from 4 to 72 hours if left untreated. Other symptoms of this

debilitating disorder may include nausea or vomiting and sensitivity to light and sound. Migraines usually worsen with physical activity. The most common migraine triggers are listed below.

## Migraine Triggers

People with migraines often have recurring attacks that are triggered by different factors. Each person's triggers can be unique, but they frequently include stress, hormonal changes, alcohol consumption, exposure to light, diet, smells, sounds, physical activity, sleep disruptions and even changes in the weather.

### 1. Stress

Stress is the most common trigger of headaches and migraines. More than 70 percent of patients experience a high level of stress leading up to a migraine. During stressful times, people can experience tightening of the neck and shoulder muscles, and this pain can be felt in the head. Anxiety and depression are also linked to migraines.

### 2. Hormonal Changes

Women are three times more likely than men to experience migraines. Changes in hormone levels are associated with women's migraine attacks, and many women experience an attack during the time of their menstrual period. A condition called "menstrual migraine" occurs when a woman's only migraine trigger is fluctuating estrogen and progesterone levels.

### 3. Alcohol

Many people report red wine as a migraine trigger. Red wine contains tyramine, which is a naturally occurring substance that may be related to migraines. Research shows that all types of alcohol, not just red wine, can be triggers.

### 4. Computer Screens

Light from computer screens is a migraine trigger, most likely caused by additional stress on the eyes. Sensitivity to indoor or outdoor light is one of the most common migraine symptoms. In addition to computer screens, other types of light, including natural, fluorescent, bright or flickering, may be to blame.

### 5. Diet

A variety of different foods are linked to migraines. Some of the most common triggers are artificial sweeteners, caffeine, MSG, chocolate, dairy products, cured meats or foods that have a strong smell. When diets affect migraines, the pain and symptoms may occur immediately after eating, or they may take a while to begin. Tracking the foods you eat and the symptoms you experience can be helpful to manage the condition.

For a complete list of migraine triggers, visit [memorialhermann.org/headache](http://memorialhermann.org/headache).

*Turn over to track your migraine.*

(over)

**Is your headache really a migraine?**

1. Do you have headaches that keep you from performing your daily activities?
2. Do you experience nausea during a headache?
3. Are you sensitive to light or sound during a headache?
4. Do you have visual changes (seeing spots or temporary vision loss) during a headache?

To discuss your headaches, contact your primary care physician, or to schedule an in-person or telehealth appointment with a neurologist, call **713.704.7100** or visit [memorialhermann.org/contact-neuro](http://memorialhermann.org/contact-neuro). Use the Migraine Tracking Tool to record your headaches and share with your provider.

**Track Your Migraine**

**Memorial Hermann Mischer Neurosciences Migraine Tracking Tool**

Date	Time (Start & Finish)	Pain Scale 1-10 (10 being severe)	Preceding Symptoms	Triggers	Medication (and dosage)	Medication Relief (complete/ moderate/none)

To learn more about headaches and migraines, visit [memorialhermann.org/headache](http://memorialhermann.org/headache). To schedule an appointment with a neurologist, call **713.704.7100** or visit [memorialhermann.org/contact-neuro](http://memorialhermann.org/contact-neuro).

