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You can get ahead of migraines

Dr K Ravishankar tells you all you need to know about those devastating migraines

Does your headache make you want to lie down in a dark room, block out the world and retreat into sleep? Do you experience severe throbbing and end up vomiting sometimes? In all likelihood, you have a migraine.

WHAT IS MIGRAINE?

A headache disorder more common among women, migraine is characterised by throbbing pain on one side of the head (the pain may switch sides across attacks) which worsens with movement, nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light and sound. The pain occurs due to abnormal narrowing and expansion of the blood vessels within and around the skull.

SYMPTOMS

All headaches are not due to eye or sinus problems. Migraine very often gets misdiagnosed. Learn to differentiate between migraine and other headaches, and be sensitive to the 'patterns' in your headache.

Producing symptoms similar to that of a migraine is a cluster headache, in which there is a sudden piercing pain on one side of the head, typically behind the eye, accompanied by watering of the eyes and nasal stuffiness. The pain, however, occurs consistently



on one side and there is usually no nausea or vomiting. There is also the "tension-type" headache, which is accompanied by a dull, generalised pain accompanied by tightness or heaviness in the head and neck muscles.

Some migraineurs also have an 'aura', which means the headache is preceded by visual disturbances (like dots or zigzag lines) or sensory disturbances (like pins-and-needles sensations).

TRIGGERS

People suffering from migraine often have a genetically-inherited vulnerability to it. Certain environmental factors — physical

exertion, emotional stress, food items (such as cheese, chocolates, and monosodium glutamate), sunlight or hormonal changes during menstruation — could trigger migraine attacks.

TREATMENT

The important thing to understand is that migraine is a potentially treatable headache disorder. But if left untreated, migraines worsen in frequency and severity.

There are speciality clinics and headache specialists who can treat headaches. If you're in pain, consult a doctor; don't self-medicate. Excessive consumption of over-the-counter medicines can induce drug-induced or analgesic rebound headaches.

SELF-HELP

- Maintaining a standard routine can reduce attacks. Too many changes or upsets in the routine can trigger a migraine, besides being a stressor in itself.
- Avoid frequent late nights and alcohol. The latter often triggers headaches.
- Breakfast is the most important meal of the day for migraineurs, so never skip it. It's also a good idea to avoid fasts.
- If going out in the sun is a trigger, avoid it. If it cannot be avoided altogether, use a pair of dark glasses and a cap or hat.

The writer is consultant in-charge of The Headache and Migraine Clinics at Jaslok and Lilavati hospitals