



# Head on!



One out of every six women suffers from severe headache. Find out the trigger points, how you can cope with it and all about the right prescription



Body  
Wise

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When Lamiya, home-maker, and Sarla, in her early 30s and a school teacher, have one of their headaches, their worlds get limited to one dark room. "There are days when I just sleep for 12 hours crippled by pain. I can't do anything," says Lamiya. Sarla adds, "I can't drive and I am very irritable with my kids", a fact that could well affect her career.

## Multiple kinds

Dr. K. Ravishankar, head of Headache and Migraine Clinic, Jaslok and Lilavati Hospital, categorises headaches into two broad categories. Five per cent, called secondary headaches, are caused by structural problems (like tumours) and are life threatening. Ninety five per cent are caused by chemical imbalances and may not be terminal

— but they can be as painful, if not more, as the first category. Migraine, cluster headaches and tension headaches fall into this group. A tendency to develop headaches can also be hereditary.

## Migraine attack

As much as 18 per cent women suffer from migraine as against six per cent men population. There is a definite link between these headaches and the female hormones. Dr. Ravishankar adds that migraine attacks increase at the time of puberty, before menstruation, while using contraceptives or during other hormonal changes.

## Trigger points

Whatever be the underlying cause, headache is triggered off by a range of external factors. "Per-

haps the most frequent, yet neglected cause of headaches in our country is skipping breakfast," claims Dr. Ravishankar. Low blood sugar, stress, bright sunlight, especially the morning sun, fermented foods, MSG in Chinese and other foods and cheesy items like pizza can also lead to headaches.

## Coping with it

The only way to cope with headaches is to follow the method of trial and error. Lamiya has observed herself and understands when the pain is coming up and tries to nip it in the bud. Sarla takes medical assistance. The good news is that in the last 20 years there has been substantial research in headaches. And it is very possible to get medical relief to control them.

## Diagnose right

It's important to understand whether your headache belongs to the five per cent category or the ninety-five per cent category. This is where most women cannot get appropriate information and fail to control their headaches. Headache specialists spend a lot of time understanding patient history to categorise the headache and accordingly, recommend an appropriate medication. Also, try out non-pharmacological treatments like yoga and biofeedback to relax. ☺

## DIY

If you believe in self-help, here's what you should do...

- First attempt self observation — be aware of what triggers off the headache. Note the frequency and intensity.
- Try to control the triggers.
- Take pain medication in order of severity. First try a balm, next paracetamol, etc. Also, note that too much medication can paradoxically cause more headaches, also, called rebound headaches.
- And if you're consuming over 10 pills a month, it's time to visit a doctor.