Migraine Headaches Signs and Symptoms

Migraines are unilateral, throbbing headaches that are more common in women and are often associated with a preceding aura. They are thought to be primary neuronal dysfunction that is centered around activation of the trigeminal ganglion. This activation causes neurogenic inflammation due to release of vasoactive substances [such as substance p, calcitonin gene-related peptide, and neurokinin A.] The neurotransmitter serotonin also plays an important, although unclear, role in pathogenesis and treatment. Migraines are treated with NSAIDS, Triptans and Antihypertensive medications like beta blockers, Ca2+ blockers, amitriptyline are used as treatment in addition to anticonvulsant medications such as topiramate and valproic acid.



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Signs and Symptoms

More Common in Women
Female Sex-symbol
Migraine headaches occur almost three times more often in women than men, and may have a familial component.

Exacerbated by Activity
Made Worse by Running into Activity-sign
These headaches are often made worse with physical activity. In contrast with tension and cluster headaches which are not.

Unilateral Pulsating Pain
One-sided Pulse Pain-bolt
The pain of migraines is unilateral, or on only one side, of the head. Pain is exacerbated by activity, and generally relieved by rest and darkness.

Aura
Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights)
25% of people who suffer from migraines will experience an aura. Auras are focal neurologic symptoms that occur up to one hour before the onset of headache. They may consist of visual, auditory, somatosensory, or motor symptoms. The most common aura symptoms are defects in the visual field, or a perception of bright or flashing lights known as scintillating scotomas.

Photophobia and Phonophobia
Photos and Phone causing Fear
Sensitivity to light (photophobia) and sound (phonophobia) are classic symptoms of migraine headache.

Nausea/Vomiting
Vomiting
Nausea and vomiting are also classic symptoms of migraine. Note this difference between migraine and tension headaches, as tension headaches are not associated with nausea and vomiting.

Duration

4 hours to 3 Days
(4) Fork Hourglass to (3) Tree Day-calendar
Migraine headaches typically last between 4 and 72 hours.

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