

OH WHAT A MIGRAINE

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What Makes a Headache a Migraine?

Almost everyone gets headaches. You might feel throbbing in the front of your head during a cold or bout with the flu, for example. Or you might feel pain in your temples or at the back of your head from a tension headache after a busy day. Most regular headaches produce a dull pain around the front, top, and sides of your head, almost like someone stretched a rubber band around it.

If you have migraines, you are not alone. Experts estimate that up to 10% of teens and young adults in the United States get migraines. Before age 10, an equal number of boys and girls get migraines. But after age 12, during and after [puberty](#), migraines affect girls three times more often than boys.

What Causes a Migraine?

Not all scientists agree about what causes migraines. Many believe that a migraine is caused by narrowing and expanding of the blood vessels in the brain. There are also theories that the level of certain chemicals in the brain may affect the nerve system that regulates pain.

How Do Doctors Diagnose and Treat Migraines?

Part of treatment may involve making certain changes in your lifestyle — like changing your sleep patterns or dietary habits or avoiding certain stressors that trigger your migraines. Your doctor may also start you on a pain relief medication or also prescribe medicines that help with nausea and vomiting. Some people need preventive medicines that are taken every day to reduce the number and severity of the migraines.

Some doctors teach a technique called **biofeedback** to their patients with migraines. This technique helps a person learn to relax and use the brain to gain control over certain body functions (like heart rate and muscle stress) that cause tension and pain. If a migraine begins slowly, many people can use biofeedback to remain calm and stop the attack.