

**Psst!**

Plan to Stay in Shape Today

# MIGRAINES



A guide to help you  
understand how to prevent  
and relieve migraine symptoms

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

 **familiprix**

# When the pain is worse than just a headache!

Migraines are no ordinary little headache. They cause much more intense pain and a number of symptoms that can affect a person's quality of life, especially when the migraines are more frequent or extremely severe. It can be a struggle to go to work, take care of your house, or even participate in pastimes you enjoy. Some people even develop anxiety about the possibility of having a migraine attack. Unfortunately, it is often difficult for friends and family to understand this phenomenon.

Migraines affect around 15% of adults. Women are two times more likely than men to be affected because hormonal changes can trigger symptoms. While migraines mainly affect adults, they can also affect children.

Fortunately, there are ways to relieve migraines and stop them from occurring as often. This guide will help you understand migraines better and give you some tips for relieving and preventing symptoms. You'll also find a calendar at the end of the guide that you can use to track your headaches. It will be useful for you and your healthcare professional. With this tool, you can maintain your quality of life and deal with what's on your mind in peace!

According to statistics, nearly 10% of boys and girls suffer from migraines before they reach puberty.

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# THE ABCs OF MIGRAINES

The mechanism of this disease is complex and not well understood. The generally accepted hypothesis is that migraines originate in the brain and are the result of a disorder of the nerves and blood vessels. Swelling is what causes migraine sufferers pain.

Some people experience warning signs, as the attack phase is often accompanied by changes in vision, nausea, and increased sensitivity to light and noises. Migraines can vary in length, frequency, and severity, so some people get migraines several times a year for very short periods of time, while others get them several times a week and the episodes can last for days.

Migraines are also genetic and can be passed from parents to children.



## Is it a migraine or a headache?

To effectively deal with migraines, it's important to recognize the symptoms. Consult the table below to see the main differences between a migraine and a headache (also called a tension headache).

Note that there are other types of headaches besides migraines and tension headaches that are not discussed in this guide. For more information, visit Association Migraine Québec's website, [www.migrainequebec.com](http://www.migrainequebec.com) (in French only), and Canadian Headache Society, [migrainecanada.org](http://migrainecanada.org).

### DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN A MIGRAINE AND A HEADACHE

	Migraine	Tension headache
SYMPTOMS	Stronger pain on one side of the head	Pain on both sides of the head, often accompanied by neck pain
	Pulsating pain (throbbing)	Non-pulsating pain
	Light and sound sensitivity	Little light and sound sensitivity
	Possible nausea/vomiting	No nausea or vomiting
	Possible vision problems (blurry vision, bright spots, flashes)	No vision problems
LENGTH	A few hours to a few days	A few minutes to several days
INTENSITY	Moderate to severe pain	Light to moderate pain



Migraine symptoms can vary from one person to another. For example, some people don't feel pain on just one side of their head, but all over. And while some people experience nausea or increased sensitivity to light or noises, others have just one of these symptoms.

## Migraines and other consequences

One thing is certain—migraines are painful and even unbearable, and negatively affect the everyday activities of those who get them. Migraines can also be a source of anxiety when they have a major impact on your daily life. You might start to fear getting a migraine, and this anxiety can increase the frequency and intensity of attacks. Furthermore, the fear of getting a migraine may cause you to isolate yourself and refrain from certain activities.

Migraine sufferers' brains produce less serotonin, a neurotransmitter that acts as a messenger and regulates functions related to emotions, pain, and the digestive system. This makes your brain hypersensitive to certain stimuli. Therefore, you may experience all kinds of symptoms in addition to pain.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Migraines are a disabling chronic disease, i.e., a disease that can prevent your body from functioning.





## Migraine warning signs

Migraines can be broken down into four phases:

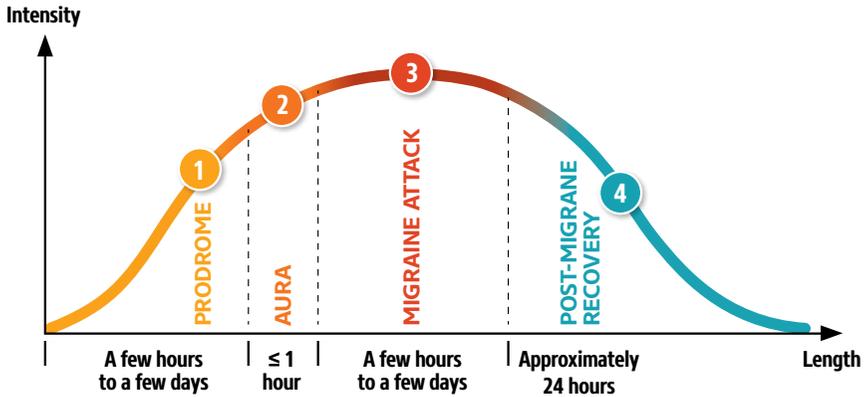
- 1 **The prodrome**
- 2 **The aura**
- 3 **The actual migraine attack**
- 4 **Post-migrane recovery**

Not everyone feels these changes, but some people can detect the warning signs of migraines in the prodromal and aura phases. When the warning signs appear, you don't need a crystal ball to know that a painful storm is brewing!

The chart on the next page outlines the four phases of the migraine, the warning signs you may experience, and at what point they appear.



## MIGRAINE PHASES



	Length	Possible warning signs
<b>1</b> <b>PRODROME</b>	A few hours to a few days before the attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fatigue</li> <li>➤ Difficulty concentrating</li> <li>➤ Stiffness in the neck</li> <li>➤ Mood swings</li> <li>➤ Nervousness</li> <li>➤ Yawning</li> <li>➤ Sugar cravings</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> <b>AURA</b>	A few minutes to an hour before the attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Flashes of light, low vision, double vision</li> <li>➤ Numbness of the face, tongue, or limbs</li> <li>➤ Trouble finding or pronouncing words</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> <b>MIGRAINE</b> <b>Migraine attack</b>	May last a few hours to a few days	
<b>4</b> <b>POST-MIGRAINE</b> <b>RECOVERY</b>	Approximately 24 hours	



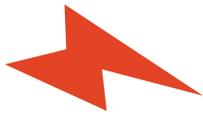
As the chart shows, the prodromal phase can occur a few hours to a few days before the attack. If you experience and recognize the signs at this stage, you can try to avoid certain triggers and relax to prevent the attack (see the “Avoiding triggers” section on page 14 of the guide).

Only 15% of migraine sufferers experience the aura phase, which delivers the bad news that a migraine is imminent in the minutes or hour that follows. But of course, there are ways to relieve migraines. The next section will equip you with some tools to fend off the attack!

### DID YOU KNOW...

Migraines are a major cause of school and work absenteeism when they are very severe or are not well managed.





# HOW TO FIGHT MIGRAINE ATTACKS?



Nowadays we have a better understanding of the specifics of migraines. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean that a painful attack can't sneak up on us! But never fear—there are a number of ways to keep your head held high during these upsetting episodes so you won't be laid out by the pain for too long.

## Simple tips

Here are some simple tips to help you mitigate the misery of a migraine attack. When the attack happens, going into a quiet, dark room can do a lot of good. Migraine symptoms can often be eased with rest. And if you are suffering from a heightened sensitivity to light and noises, moving to a quiet, dark place often helps. You can also apply a cold compress to your forehead and take a nap. The goal is for you to relax and get some rest.

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to recent studies, removing blue light (LEDs) from the rooms you use most often at home can help reduce the occurrence of migraines. Use more incandescent or halogen bulbs to create ambiance!



## The when, why, and how of medication

Your healthcare professional can provide you with medication that should be taken at the first signs of a migraine to help stave off attacks. Some drugs require a prescription and some are over-the-counter.

An over-the-counter painkiller is usually recommended first, but if the attacks are very severe or the painkillers aren't effective, you can also get other types of prescription medication. There are lots of options available to relieve a migraine, so don't be discouraged if the first thing you try doesn't do the trick.

You can try different formulas such as fast-dissolving tablets, nasal sprays, or injectable medication depending on your symptoms, tolerance, and preferences. You can also get effective medication for nausea and vomiting if you have these symptoms.

If you need to take medication to relieve your migraines, here are a few tips:

- Take the medication as soon as the symptoms start
- Never take more than the recommended dose: you rarely get better results that way and you expose yourself to side effects and risk the rebound effect (which we will discuss in the next section)
- Do you get migraines frequently? Do you need to take painkillers several times a week? Talk to your healthcare professional for guidance.





## Steer clear of medication overuse headaches, also called the rebound effect!

A medication overuse headache occurs when a person overuses the same type of drug to treat their migraine attacks. Using the same painkiller more than 12 days out of the month for several consecutive months can cause this phenomenon. If you regularly resort to medication more than two or three times a week to treat your migraines, you run the risk of experiencing the rebound effect: a painful reoccurring phenomenon that includes more frequent and more severe attacks that the drug isn't as effective against.

What's more, when you stop using the medication, the pain can be unbearable. You risk ending up with chronic migraines that occur every day!

Here are a few tips to help you figure out if you are suffering from medication overuse headaches:

- You get headaches more than 15 days out of the month and you need to keep taking stronger doses to relieve them.
- You wake up in the morning with a headache.
- Your headaches come back a few hours after you've taken a painkiller and/or gets worse when you take it.



If you believe you have developed medication overuse headaches, the only way to break the vicious cycle is to gradually cut down on the drug causing them. The good news is that most people see significant improvement after they stop taking the medication that caused the problem. There are also other alternatives that can be prescribed to make you more comfortable during this necessary step. Talk to your healthcare professional—they can advise you on the steps to follow for the most effective relief!



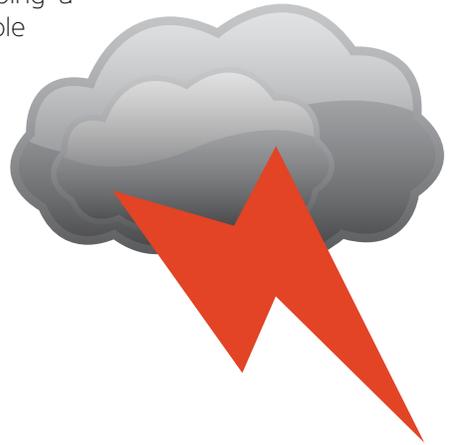
Before taking a new medication, be sure to speak with your healthcare professional so they can make sure the treatment is safe and adapted to your condition.



# TIPS FOR PREVENTING MIGRAINES

## **Avoid migraine triggers.**

There are many things that can trigger a migraine. What's more, these triggers can vary a lot from one person to the next. That's why the table below gives several examples for each family of triggers. How do you figure out what your migraine triggers are? One very useful approach is by keeping a migraine diary. You can find an example at the end of this guide.



Migraine trigger types	Examples
DIETARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Skipped or delayed meals</li> <li>✘ Dehydration</li> <li>✘ Specific foods:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aged cheeses (e.g., brie, camembert, cheddar)</li> <li>• Caffeine</li> <li>• Processed meats</li> <li>• Alcohol</li> <li>• Food additives such as monosodium glutamate (in seasonings and potato chips), aspartame (in diet drinks and foods), nitrites (in processed meats like sausages, salami, or ham), sulphites (in wine), and yeast (in beer)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
HORMONAL FLUCTUATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Menstrual periods</li> <li>✘ Postpartum period</li> <li>✘ Puberty</li> <li>✘ Menopause</li> </ul>
STRESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Anxiety, depression</li> <li>✘ Trying circumstances</li> <li>✘ Illness</li> </ul>
SLEEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Lack of sleep</li> <li>✘ Jetlag</li> </ul>
ENVIRONMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Heat, humidity</li> <li>✘ Sudden weather changes (thunderstorm, blizzard, etc.)</li> <li>✘ Period of seasonal allergies</li> <li>✘ Bright light, loud noise</li> <li>✘ Strong smells (e.g., perfume, cigarette smoke)</li> </ul>
DRUGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ Overuse of painkillers</li> <li>✘ See your healthcare professional for other possible medications</li> </ul>



## MIGRAINES, WOMEN, AND HORMONES

Hormonal changes can be a factor in triggering migraines. Variations in hormone levels often appear with puberty, often associated with ovulation and menstruation.

Perimenopause, including premenopause, is another period associated with hormonal disruptions. Migraine attacks may become more frequent or less so during this period, depending on the individual.

Migraines often die down a year after menstruation stops; but they may not, particularly if the woman is undergoing hormone replacement therapy for menopause or has a chronic form of the disease.

### Medications and alternative prevention methods DO exist!

#### Medications that prevent

In addition to using drugs to treat migraine episodes, some people may benefit from preventive drug treatment. This option is generally reserved for people with chronic or extremely debilitating headaches and is aimed at reducing the frequency and severity of attacks. In other words, preventive treatment is designed to cut down on the number of migraines and to make each episode shorter or less painful.

Preventive drugs are taken daily and may take a few weeks to become fully effective. So be patient—the results can be worth waiting for.

A realistic hope with this type of treatment would be a 50% reduction in the number and severity of episodes. Be sure to talk to your healthcare professional to learn more and find out if preventive medication could be right for you.



### Alternative therapies

Migraine sufferers may find the discomfort they experience in the early phases (e.g., warning signs such as cravings, visual disturbances), and the headache phase with its associated symptoms (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation, severe anxiety), prompts them to seek out alternative therapies.

Some of the alternative therapies available may provide some relief for certain patients. **Alternative therapies include acupuncture, physiotherapy, massage therapy, and chiropractic.**

Other alternative approaches focus on managing anxiety or learning how to control episodes. **Hypnosis, meditation, and certain types of psychotherapy** follow this approach. It's a good idea to check with a healthcare professional before you try such therapy. Make sure that the person you're working with is a member in good standing of a professional association and is qualified to deliver the treatment you want.



## ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture is a technique of traditional Chinese medicine involving the insertion and manipulation of thin needles at various points in the body. Interestingly, recent studies indicate that acupuncture can be an effective treatment for preventing migraines. It may be a valid option for those who are interested, either alone or in combination with medication. You should make sure your acupuncturist is a professional member of Ordre des Acupuncteurs du Québec.



## MEDITATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Meditation and physical activity both promote calm and relaxation. Studies have found that meditation alters the brain's pain control areas, which supports its use in migraine therapy. Physical activity, on the other hand, works by stimulating circulation, providing more oxygen all through the body, including the brain. Not only is exercise good for your health in general, it helps reduce anxiety and can cut down on migraine attacks.

Yoga is an example of physical activity associated with breath control and relaxation techniques. It may help reduce headache intensity. So hit the mat!



## Did somebody say “migraine diary”?

The idea of keeping a migraine diary has indeed come up in this guide, and with good reason. Migraine diaries are widely recognized among healthcare professionals as providing valuable insights for use in treatment.

A migraine diary is a daily record of headaches used to assess what’s going on in an effort to control migraines better and reduce their effects on daily life.

A migraine diary may reveal things like triggers, show the frequency of attacks, track how much and which drugs you’re using, and identify the most effective medications. It can also alert you to possible drug overuse. Your migraine diary is an invaluable tool for your healthcare professional. Remember to take it with you when you go for your appointment.

How long do I have to keep a diary? Generally speaking, three to four months is likely to do the trick. The point here is to get a broad enough perspective that you can understand what’s going on and figure out the best way to reduce the number and severity of the attacks. Talk it over with your healthcare professional.

To start your very own migraine diary, go to the end of this guide. You will find a sample from Karine’s migraine diary as well as a blank calendar!

### DID YOU KNOW?

Families, friends, and employers often play down the seriousness of a migraine and fail to grasp how incapacitating it is.



# CONCLUSION

Migraine is a chronic illness that may have significant effects on the quality of life of those who have it. It's also a major cause of lost days at work and school. Certain migraine triggers can be identified and avoided, and there are ways to relieve the pain, but the attention of a qualified healthcare practitioner is often necessary to keep migraines effectively under control. So be sure to see your health professional for help finding ways to deal with the problems migraines cause. And remember to take your migraine diary along!



# APPENDIX

Now let's look at how to fill out a headache tracking calendar, using Karine's as a model.

Karine is a young, 28-year-old professional who works as a project manager for a company in the private sector. She has had occasional migraines before. But recently she's noticed that severe headaches have become much more frequent. Last month she even had to take days off work. She was frustrated and concerned, so she sought help from her healthcare professional, who recommended keeping a diary to track her headaches. She got an appointment to come back in one month and look over the results.

## Completing a monthly calendar for tracking your headaches:

1. **Headaches:** Make a note of the days when you had a headache, specifying how severe it was.
  - L = Light
  - M = Moderate
  - I = Intense
  - If you didn't have a headache, leave it blank.
2. **Menstrual periods:** Tick days if applicable.
3. **Medications:** Indicate any medications you took. Suggestion: Put in just the first letter in the drug name.
4. **Relief:** Indicate if the treatment made you feel better. Indicate whether any relief was partial or complete.
5. **Suspected triggers:** You can write in a list of suspected triggers and tick them if they might be linked to a given episode (e.g., alcohol, stress, insomnia).

L

A **light** headache is an “underlying,” mildly troublesome headache. You don't necessarily feel the need for painkillers and you can continue functioning normally.

M

A **moderate** headache is painful enough that you feel the need for pain medication. You can still pretty much keep going, for the most part.

I

An **intense** headache prevents you from functioning normally. Painkillers and rest are not optional.



## What Karine's calendar revealed:

1. Karine had six intense migraines (I) in the month.
2. She had three moderate episodes (M).
3. Karine used two medications to treat her acute attacks (A and B).
4. The degree of relief provided by the medications was as follows:
  - 5/9 attacks were well controlled by the drug she used (marked "+")
  - 3/9 attacks were partially relieved (marked "+/-")
5. Certain triggers were found (menstruation, stress/fatigue, alcohol).

Karine and her healthcare professional will have a number of options to consider for improving her migraine therapy at their upcoming appointment. It will help cut down on the days she has to miss work and make life more comfortable for her. That's what a migraine tracking calendar can do. Her medical team will be able to recommend effective adjustments and additions to her treatment regimen.

In order to help you pinpoint what is causing your migraines, make copies of the sample calendar on pages 25 and 26.

### DID YOU KNOW?

There are now migraine diary apps for smartphones. You might find them worth checking out if you're more of a tech than paper-and-pencil type. Feel free to use whatever works for you.

## CALENDARS TO TRACK YOUR HEADACHES

MONTH: <input type="text"/>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Headache (L-M-I)															
Menstrual periods (tick)															
Medication															
Medication															
Relief															
<b>Suspected triggers</b>															
1.															
2.															
3.															



# SOURCES AND USEFUL LINKS

## 1. **Migraine Québec:**

[www.migrainequebec.com](http://www.migrainequebec.com): migraine information website founded by Dr. Élisabeth Leroux

## 2. **Migraine Canada:**

[www.migrainecanada.org](http://www.migrainecanada.org)

## 3. **American Headache Society:**

[www.americanheadachesociety.org/](http://www.americanheadachesociety.org/):  
American headache information website

## 4. **Clinique de la migraine de Montréal:**

[www.migrainemontreal.com](http://www.migrainemontreal.com)

## 5. **Familiprix**

[www.familiprix.com](http://www.familiprix.com)

# IN THIS GUIDE

-  The ABCs of migraines
-  How to fight migraine attacks?
-  Tips for preventing migraines
-  APPENDIX: Sample calendar to track your headaches