

# DO YOU SUSPECT MIGRAINE?

**Migraine** is a neurological disease that affects roughly 14% of Canadians. It's recognized as the third most common disease in the world, yet it can be difficult to diagnose due to a lack of understanding among primary care providers.

Migraine is linked to genes that affect how neurons and blood vessels function in the brain. These genetic differences can make someone more likely to experience migraine attacks. During an attack, inflammatory chemicals are released around sensitive nerves in the brain. The experience of a migraine attack can vary widely from person to person.

*This guide is not a diagnostic tool, but is designed to help you self-reflect and take note of your migraine symptoms. Schedule an appointment with your primary care provider to discuss the results.*

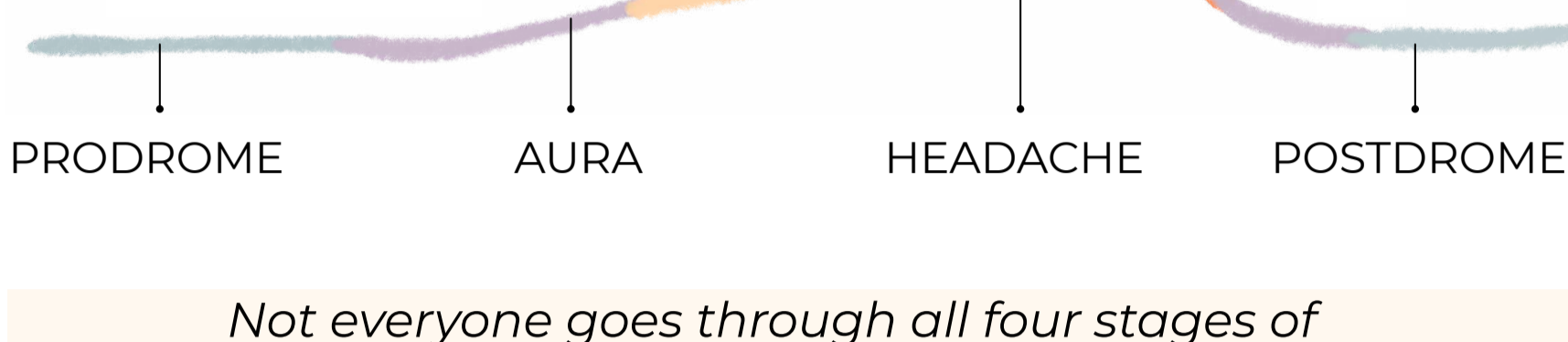
**Below are some possible symptoms of a migraine attack.**

## CHECKLIST:

- Headache
- Sensitivity to light, sounds, smells, or movement
- Vertigo or dizziness
- Vision changes or aura
- Neck pain
- Yawning
- Fatigue
- Nausea (even if tolerable) and vomiting
- Head pressure (not just pain)
- Facial numbness/paralysis
- Brain fog
- "Hangover" feeling after attacks

As you can see, a migraine attack isn't limited to headache, but can encompass a range of other symptoms. These symptoms can appear at various stages of an attack.

## Phases of a migraine attack



*Not everyone goes through all four stages of migraine or experience the same symptoms during separate migraine attacks.*

### PRODROME

DURATION: A FEW HOURS TO DAYS

ONSET OF CORTICAL SPREADING DEPRESSION (CDS)

BRAINSTEM      HYPOTHALAMUS

IRRITABILITY  
DEPRESSION  
YAWNING  
INCREASED NEED TO URINATE  
FOOD CRAVINGS  
SENSITIVITY TO LIGHT/SOUND  
PROBLEMS CONCENTRATING  
FATIGUE AND MUSCLE STIFFNESS  
DIFFICULTY SPEAKING  
DIFFICULTY SLEEPING

### AURA\*

DURATION: 5 TO 60 MINUTES

VISUAL CORTEX

CORTICAL SPREADING DEPRESSION (CDS)

VISUAL DISTURBANCES  
TEMPORARY LOSS OF SIGHT  
NUMBNESS AND TINGLING  
SPEECH DIFFICULTIES  
CONFUSION

*\*Around 20% of patients with migraine experiences the aura phase.*

### HEADACHE

DURATION: 4 TO 72 HOURS

PAIN SIGNALS

THALAMUS  
RELEASE OF NEUROPEPTIDES (E.G. CGRP, SP, NKA) AND INTESTINAL PEPTIDES (VIP, NO)  
DILATION AND INFLAMMATION OF BLOOD VESSELS

TRIGEMINAL NERVE  
TRIGEMINAL GANGLION

THROBBING HEAD PAIN  
NAUSEA/VOMITING  
SENSITIVITY TO LIGHT/SMELL/SOUND  
NASAL CONGESTION  
NECKPAIN AND STIFFNESS  
ANXIETY

### POSTDROME

DURATION: 34 TO 48 HOURS

WIDESPREAD REDUCTION IN BRAIN-BLOOD FLOW

INABILITY TO CONCENTRATE  
FATIGUE  
DEPRESSION  
EUPHORIA  
COGNITIVE DIFFICULTIES

*Adapted from the AbbVie Migraine Map.*

## PREPARING FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT

**If you're experiencing migraine attacks, reflect on the following prompts:**

1. Have they started happening closer together, or become more severe?  
Yes      No
2. How long do they typically last?
3. Do they impact my work, relationships, or daily function?  
Yes      No
4. Does anyone else in my family experience migraine-like symptoms?  
Yes      No
5. How do I feel before, during, and after an episode?
6. Have I ever gone to the hospital because of head pain or headache?  
Yes      No
7. How often am I taking medications to address my symptoms?

It can be helpful to take notes on the symptoms, duration, frequency, and severity of your migraine attacks in the lead-up to your appointment with a primary care provider. **Tracking your symptoms** and sharing your concerns with your primary care provider will help you work together to reach a diagnosis and get the best care possible for you.

While you're waiting for an appointment, consider adopting migraine relief strategies such as gentle stretches, scalp massages, cold compresses, adequate hydration, and light-impact exercise. You can even reach out to a pharmacist for advice in the meantime.

## DURING YOUR APPOINTMENT

You know your body best. If you feel something is wrong, it's okay to speak up and ask questions. Here are a few suggested questions to ask your primary care provider:

1. Could my symptoms be related to migraine without headache?
2. What tests can I have done to rule out other causes?
3. What symptoms would make you reconsider this diagnosis?
4. At what point is a referral to a neurologist or headache specialist recommended?
5. If a medication is prescribed, when should I be able to tell whether it's effective?
6. If the initial treatment plan doesn't work for me, what's the next step? Are there more options?
7. When should we schedule a follow-up appointment to discuss how I'm responding to the initial treatment?

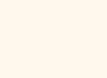
## AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT

**Migraine is treatable.** There are ways to alleviate your symptoms, but you have to find a treatment plan that works for you. If your symptoms persist, ask your primary care provider to refer you to a neurologist or a migraine clinic.

Use this guide to support conversations with your primary care provider as you work together to better understand your symptoms and pursue a diagnosis.

Diagnosed with migraine? Check out Migraine Canada's [Migraine Discussion Guide](#).

*The information presented here is intended for educational purposes only and is not meant to be a diagnostic tool. Always consult your health care provider for personalized guidance regarding your health.*



Reviewed by  
**Migraine Canada – Patient Advisory Committee**

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