

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.

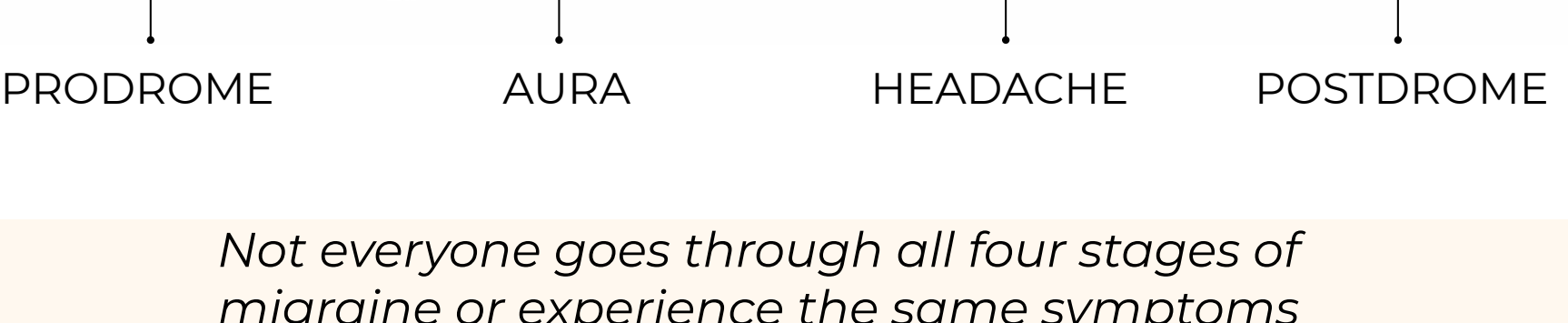
Below are some possible symptoms of a migraine attack.

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
- “Hungover” 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 migrane attacks.

PRODROME
DURATION: A FEW HOURS TO DAYS

ONSET OF CORTICAL SPREADING DEPRESSION (CSD)

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 (CSD)

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

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

HEADACHE
DURATION: 4 TO 72 HOURS

PAIN SIGNALS

THALAMUS
RELEASE OF NEURO-PEPTIDES (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
NECK PAIN AND STIFFNESS
ANXIETY

POSTDROME
DURATION: 24 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:

- Have they started happening closer together, or become more severe?
Yes No
- How long do they typically last?
- Do they impact my work, relationships, or daily function?
Yes No
- Does anyone else in my family experience migraine-like symptoms?
Yes No
- How do I feel before, during, and after an episode?
- Have I ever gone to the hospital because of head pain or headache?
Yes No
- 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:

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

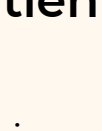
AFTER YOUR APPOINTMENT

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 Migrane 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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