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Migraine pain expensive to alleviate

■ **HEADACHE:** Migraines are not caused by stress and are actually neurological

By **Jennifer Schmitt**
Community Editor

The throbbing is focused on one side of the head. Any sound and light intensifies the pain. Then, nausea sets in, adding to the already miserable experience. This is not an ordinary headache. It is a migraine.

Migraines are neurological headaches, unlike ordinary headaches, which are most often stress related, said Dr. Donald England, a researcher at PeaceHealth Medical Center. A migraine can last from four to 72 hours, and the pain is usually focused on one side of the brain.

"A lot of people have chronic headaches that aren't migraines," he said. "Most people label tension headaches as migraines, but they aren't."

Migraine headaches tend to have a pulsating quality and are usually aggravated by ordinary physical activity such as walking up stairs. The headaches can also cause nausea and vomiting as well as a heightened sensitivity to light and sound.

"When someone has a migraine, all they want to do is lie down in a dark, quiet room and wait for it to go away," England said.

There are two types of migraines: classical and common.

Approximately 20 percent of migraine sufferers have classical migraines that are preceded by an "aura," England said.

Auras, such as tingling and numbness throughout the body, seeing bright spots or zig-zagging lights and feeling irritable, are warning symptoms that occur right before a migraine begins.

Common migraines are similar to classical migraines but are not preceded by an aura, England said.

Migraines occur when the brain sends out signals to the

DEALING WITH MIGRAINES

SYMPTOMS:

- Throbbing or dull aching pain on one side of your head
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Blurred vision
- Sensitivity to light, noise, odors
- Fatigue
- Confusion
- Lightheadedness
- Cold hands or feet
- Stiff or tender neck

TRIGGERS:

- Foods and drinks, including alcoholic beverages, cheese and chocolate
- Weather or altitude changes
- Changes in sleeping patterns, especially sleeping later or longer than usual
- Missing meals or fasting
- Strong odors, bright lights or loud noises



WAYS TO REDUCE A MIGRAINE:

- Lying in a dark, quiet room
- Taking a pain reliever as soon as a headache occurs
- Putting a cold rag over your forehead
- Massaging your scalp using a lot of pressure
- Putting pressure on your temples; tying a band around your head

MATT GARTON/Emerald

nerves that control sensation, England said. The blood vessels in the brain dilate abnormally and become sensitized. The flow of blood through these dilated vessels creates the throbbing pain, he said.

Doctors are unsure why the brain sends these signals, but researchers have been able to identify certain things, or "triggers," that may cause the migraines.

Some triggers include certain foods, stress, excessive motion and hormonal changes. Identifying the triggers is one of the first steps in treating migraines, England said.

"Avoiding the triggers does not stop migraines completely, but it definitely can cut down on the number of migraines someone has," he said.

There are also several medications available to migraine sufferers, ranging from common pain-relievers such as aspirin to injections that reduce the dilation of the blood vessels. For patients whose migraines are linked to the sensory nerves that control smell, there are nasal sprays available that will sometimes relieve the migraine, England said.

Most medications for migraines are expensive, England said. One way to cut the cost of medication and treatment is to volunteer as a test subject for migraine medication research.

All evaluations, treatments and tests are free for volunteers. The volunteer is given either the medication being tested or a drug already on the market. Volunteers, who keep a detailed diary of the results of the medication, are regularly evaluated by the research physician.

One of the drawbacks is that the volunteers may not be getting the newest drug being tested, so the medication they are given may be something that is less effective.

England said volunteer patients who do not receive relief from their headache after a few hours are often allowed to take a different medication to stop the pain.

Anyone who is interested in more information about volunteering for migraine medication trials can call the PeaceHealth Research Department at 687-6382.

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