

700 Children's Drive  
Columbus, Ohio 43205-2696  
nationwidechildrens.org

## HEADACHES: MIGRAINE

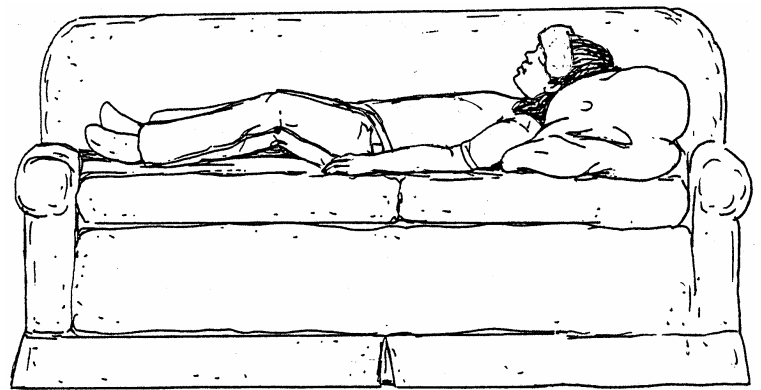
Migraine headaches occur when there are changes in some of the nerves and blood vessels.

Migraines are common in children. Often there is a history of headaches in the family. Your doctor will ask if other family members, such as parents and grandparents, have a history of frequent headaches. A physical exam and a history of the child's headaches are very important in planning the child's treatment.

### SYMPTOMS OF MIGRAINE HEADACHES

For some children, migraines give a warning signal (known as an "aura") a few minutes before the pain begins. These warning signals may include:

- Tingling, weakness, or numbness in the arms or legs
- Smell of strange odors
- Speech problems
- Eye problems - child may see flashing lights, colors, jagged lines, or may lose vision in one eye



**Picture 1** Sleep or rest may relieve headache pain.

Pain may start on one side of the head and stay there, or both sides of the head may be affected. The pain may occur in any part of the head. Along with the headache, a child may also have:

- Throbbing pain (may throb to the rhythm of heart beat)
- Pain may be moderate to severe
- Sensitivity to light and sound
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Physical activity may make the pain worse

### PREVENTION

- Try to keep your child on a regular daily routine (school, meals, and activities).
- Your child should get plenty of rest. However, **too much** sleep can also trigger a headache.
- Serve well-balanced meals at regular times. Do not let your child skip meals.
- Your child should drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Sports drinks may also be given.
- Your child should take a multivitamin everyday.
- Avoid foods that are known to trigger a headache in your child after they have been identified.
- Your child should exercise regularly, but not too hard, because this may also trigger a headache.
- Keep stress to a minimum. Good communication between parents and children is important so that you are aware of what is troubling your child.
- Your child should drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Sports drinks may also be given.
- A multivitamin should be taken every day.

## TRIGGERS

Things that may bring on a migraine are called "triggers." Emotional stress and being overly tired are the two most common triggers of migraines in children. Other possible triggers include:

- Stress – school, work, too many extra activities
- Problems with friends, family members or parents
- Major change – moving to a new home or school
- Feeling sad all the time
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Odors
  - Perfume
  - Gasoline
  - Some food odors
- Bright lights
- Certain noises
- Change in weather or altitude
- Too much or too little sleep
- Too much exercise
- Poor eating habits – skipping meals
- Certain foods
  - Meats prepared with nitrates (bacon, pepperoni, hot dogs, bologna)
  - Chocolate
  - Aged cheeses (cheddar, Gruyere, Brie and Camembert)
  - Coffee and tea
  - Soft drinks with caffeine
  - Bananas, pineapples, raspberries
  - Citrus fruit and fruit juices
  - Yeast (fresh hot breads, raised coffee cakes and doughnuts)
  - Shellfish, smoked pickled fish
  - Yogurt and sour cream
  - Peas, lima beans, pea pods, avocados
  - Monosodium glutamate (a food additive)
  - Food dyes
  - Vinegars (except white vinegar)
  - Nuts, peanut butter
  - Canned figs
  - Pork
  - Sauerkraut

## TREATMENT

- To relieve headache pain, you may give your child ibuprofen (such as Advil® or Motrin®) every 6 hours. It is important not to give your child too much pain medicine. Taking more than 2 doses in a week for a few months may lead to more headaches. The headaches may also become more painful. Your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist will tell you the proper dosage of ibuprofen to give. Do not give aspirin or other medicines to your child unless your doctor tells you otherwise.
- It is often helpful to take your migraine medicine as early as possible. Please talk with your doctor about medicines for your child's headaches.
- If possible, your child should lie down or go to sleep until the headache is gone (Picture 1).
- A cool or warm compress applied to the forehead while your child is resting may help.
- Biofeedback is a type of relaxation training which may be effective in treating migraine headaches. If your doctor feels this would help your child, you will be given more information.
- If migraines occur more than twice a month or are preventing normal activity, your doctor may prescribe other medicines. Medicine may keep the headaches from happening, or it may make them less severe.



