

# Migraine

## Myths and facts



There are still many misconceptions and prejudices regarding migraines. Test your knowledge by reading the following.

### MYTH

#### A migraine is just a big headache.

**FACT:** Migraines are a neurological disorder. During a migraine, the person affected by the migraine is unable to function normally. The headache is one of the symptoms, but other symptoms are often present: neck pain, nausea, difficulty tolerating noise or light, etc. A series of very specific criteria differentiates a migraine from a headache.

### MYTH

#### A migraine comes from strong pressure in the head's blood vessels.

**FACT:** Migraines are not easy to explain. For a long time, it was believed that migraines came from strong pressure in the head's blood vessels. We now know that an abnormal reaction in the brain's neurons triggers these attacks. Like a domino effect, this reaction in the neurons leads to a series of other reactions (among them, inflammation), that end up causing pain and other symptoms.

### MYTH

#### Only women suffer from migraines.

**FACT:** Migraines affect 1 out of 18 men and 1 out of 7 women. Hormonal fluctuations in women are one of the factors that explain why they are more affected than men.

### MYTH

#### A migraine can be caused by depression or anxiety.

**FACT:** A migraine is not caused by depression or anxiety. However, there may be links between psychological health and migraines. For example, depression can increase the number of migraines and cause them to be more painful. Also, stressful situations can trigger migraines. In addition, having numerous attacks may affect your mood and with time, cause depression. When treating migraines, their effects on psychological health should also be considered.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

The scent of a perfume or the smell of cigarette smoke can trigger a migraine in certain people.

#### MYTH

### Since there is no cure for migraines, I just have to endure my pain.

**FACT:** It is true that there is presently no remedy to cure migraine. However, it is possible to control them better. Certain medications as well as healthy habits help to reduce pain and the number of attacks. If your migraines affect your family life and social life, consult a doctor.

#### MYTH

### People who suffer from “weekend migraines” just want to avoid their life partner and family.

**FACT:** Unfortunately, several people have migraine on weekends. They are genuine! Attacks that occur on Saturday mornings are often caused by a sudden change in daily habits: stress drops, sleep hours change, we drink more or less coffee, we eat breakfast later, etc.

#### MYTH

### To get rid of a migraine problem, you simply have to make a very strong wish.

**FACT:** Migraines cannot be healed by sheer will. And there is no miracle cure. The problem sometimes requires medical help. Even with help, migraines sometimes remain a form of handicap that requires significant adjustments by the person affected as well as by family and friends.

#### MYTH

### If I have migraines, I shouldn't do too much physical exercise.

**FACT:** On the contrary, a regular exercise program geared to your abilities can reduce the number of attacks. Good physical health helps to control migraines. If however, you notice that physical exercise triggers your migraines, consult a doctor as soon as possible.

#### MYTH

### Children are not affected by migraines.

**FACT:** Five to ten percent of children have migraines. Before puberty, boys are affected as much as girls. Migraines in children do not last as long as those in adults, but they still affect their activities.

#### MYTH

### Migraines are a well-known problem and are easy to treat.

**FACT:** Unfortunately, this is far from the truth. Migraine is one of the most difficult problems to understand, diagnose and treat. There are still many aspects to discover and new treatments must be developed. A lot of active research is being done on the subject.



#### USEFUL RESOURCES

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available (in French only). Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site [chumontreal.qc.ca/votresante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/votresante)

*This document was prepared in collaboration with Migraine Québec.*

*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal [chumontreal.qc.ca](http://chumontreal.qc.ca)