

Top 10 Things I Want to Share About Migraines



Much about Migraines is poorly understood, and there are still many misconceptions about Migraines. To help you better understand what Migraines are and their impact on the lives of those who have them, here are the top 10 things I want to share with you about Migraines:

- 1** Migraine is a genetic neurological disease. Although the cause and pathophysiology of the disease is not yet fully understood, current research indicates that it's caused by genetics and overly sensitive neurons in the brain that fire in a wave when someone with Migraine disease encounters a Migraine trigger. At this time, there is no cure for Migraine disease.
- 2** According to the World Health Organization, a severe Migraine attack can be as disabling as quadriplegia.
- 3** Migraine afflicts more than 37 million Americans, including 18% of women, 6% of men, and 19 percent of veterans of the Iraq war.

4 Migraines have other symptoms in addition to the headache. Some of those symptoms can be as debilitating as the headache or even more debilitating, depending on the person.

Symptoms of a Migraine attack may include:

- Mild to severe headache that is often one-sided and pulsatile or throbbing.
- Nausea and/or vomiting.
- Increased sensitivity to light, sound, and odors.
- Difficulty in concentrating and thinking clearly.
- Aphasia – impaired ability to use or comprehend words.
- Hemiplegia – one-sided paralysis.
- Extreme fatigue.
- Visual symptoms including blurry vision, partial loss of sight, seeing flashing lights, and more.
- Decrease in or loss of hearing
- Allodynia – hypersensitivity to feel and touch
- Dizziness or vertigo.
- Dehydration or retention of fluids, depending on the individual's reactions.
- Many more.

5 Migraine attacks are precipitated by the Migraineur's exposure to Migraine triggers. Migraine triggers are physiological, not emotional. Each Migraineur's triggers are different from those of other Migraineurs.

Potential triggers include:

- Perfumes and fragrances. Just being around someone wearing fragrance can trigger a devastating Migraine attack for some people.
- Bright and/or flickering lights, including fluorescent lighting. Some Migraineurs cannot work in fluorescent lighting. Some need to wear sunglasses at times, even indoors.
- Loud noises and crowded places.
- Changes in the weather and/or altitude.
- Cigarette smoke; exhaust fumes; odors or fumes from chemicals, including some cleaning products.
- Certain foods, especially foods prepared with MSG and other preservatives.

6 It's a myth that people with Migraines can't handle stressful situations or high-stress jobs. Stress is NOT a Migraine trigger. It's what's called an exacerbating factor that makes Migraineurs more susceptible to their triggers just as stress makes anyone more susceptible to the virus that brings on the common cold.

7 Migraineurs often feel alone, isolated, desolate, and even guilty. They often feel guilty because they aren't able to "be there" for their family and friends as much as they want to be and because they may have to miss days of work.

- 8** Not all doctors have the experience, training, and knowledge to treat Migraine properly. Contrary to what most people think, neurologists aren't necessarily Migraine specialists, and Migraine specialists aren't necessarily neurologists. Finding a doctor to properly treat Migraine is one of the most important, and sometimes most difficult, steps in treatment. There is a shortage of qualified Migraine specialists, so many Migraineurs must travel significant distances to find adequate care.
- 9** Migraine disease can be disabling for some Migraineurs to the extent that they qualify for Social Security disability benefits or qualify for accommodation under the Americans with Disability Act. There are Migraineurs whose disease is so severe that doctors are unable to help them adequately control the attacks, and the Migraineur is unable to work or participate in "normal" daily activities. When a Migraine attack strikes, many Migraineurs desperately need a dark, quiet place to lie down.
- 10** If they had a choice, the Migraineurs in your life would like nothing better than to be "normal." They want to feel well and be present in your life and in their own. But it's not a matter of choice. Migraineurs must accept that they have a disease just as they would if they had diabetes, asthma, or any other disease. They need your help, support, and understanding.

To help you better understand Migraine disease and those who have it, here are links to some helpful information:

- Potential Migraine Phases and Symptoms
<http://migraine.com/migraine-basics/migraine-phases/>
- Migraine Management: The 7 Essentials
<http://migraine.com/blog/migraine-management-essentials>
- When Migraines Endanger Our Friendships
<http://migraine.com/blog/when-migraines-endanger-our-friendships/>
- ADA Accommodations & Migraine Triggers: Making the Workplace Work for You
<http://migraine.com/blog/ada-accommodations-migraine-triggers-making-the-workplace-work-for-you/>
- 10 Things You Should Know About Chronic Migraines and Applying for Social Security Disability
<http://migraine.com/blog/10-things-you-should-know-about-chronic-migraines-and-applying-for-social-security-disability/>