13 Phrases Migraine Sufferers Are Tired of Hearing

by BARBARA LEECH

What Not to Say to Someone With Migraine

Those of us who suffer with chronic migraine pain have probably all experienced the insensitive, and sometimes outrageous, comments made by those around us. These are typically people who do not understand what it is to live either in pain or in fear of the next attack. Strangely, it has occurred in my life with alarming frequency and from surprising sources, such as the misguided advice of an ER doctor and close relatives without a clue.

It is frustrating when you are already suffering and feeling like you are just getting by, and then someone says something so ridiculous or insulting there really is no polite response. I say very little in those instances, though a comeback is playing in my mind.

Here are a few of the top insensitive comments about migraines we have all heard at some point. May it serve as a guide of what not to say to someone with migraine.

1. “You should just drink more water.”

Yes, I am aware dehydration can cause headache pain, but this is not my case. I drink plenty of water every day and I drink more when I feel a migraine is coming on, but that is not what triggers my migraines, nor will it solve my chronic health issue.

2. “Have you tried (insert medication name here)?”

Why yes, I don’t actually just sit there and take nothing to try and stop the crushing pain. I am aware there are things like Excedrin Migraine, Aspirin, Imitrex, Aleve and even Botox. I would have to live in isolation, without television or communication with any doctor to not have at least tried these obvious, well-known migraine medications.

3. “There is already a treatment for migraines, but the big pharmaceutical companies want you to stay sick.”

I’m not sure who you know that has been cured, while others remain out of the loop, but I am pretty sure the ones who produce a cure would rake in the money if that were at all true. There is no cure as of yet.

4. “Think positive! You are attracting negative energy and manifesting this condition. It is all in your head.”

It is an actual condition that occurs in my brain — which is located in my head — so you are partially correct, and that area sends out signals of pain to my nerve sensors. It is actually mostly caused by triggers (stress, light and certain scents) and my body’s hormones, and you would know about these concrete reasons if you were to

actually research the science behind migraines. There is nothing in there in those medical studies about positive thoughts or energy saving me from an attack.

5. “We all get headaches.”

Yes, this is true, but not everyone gets migraines and they are not the same thing. Comparing a headache to a migraine is like comparing a soft summer rain to a hurricane. Unless you have felt this, you cannot and should not make a comparison.

6. “Seriously, how can you have *another* migraine? Again?”

Well, they don’t seem to set a schedule for me to know when they will strike, so I don’t know why I have another one, but I assure you they will keep coming unless someone finds an actual lasting cure.

Next page: "You don't look sick," "You need to get more exercise," and more phrases we hate hearing

7. “You don’t look sick.”

That is because I push on through most of the time and continue with as much of my life as I can. If this struck you several days per month, wouldn’t you try and keep living your life too? It doesn’t mean I am not in agony — it means I am trying to keep going.

8. “You just need to get out more.”

With migraines you tend to retreat when you are under attack. But I do actually go out and do things, the same things people who don’t suffer from migraines do.

9. “You need to get more exercise.”

Exercise is part of several things you can do to help control the number of attacks you may get, but it does not prevent or stop a migraine. I actually do exercise on my good days and, big surprise, it does not stop me from getting migraines.

10. “I think you thrive on sympathy.”

While I think everyone appreciates having someone sympathize when they are in excruciating pain, I am not “claiming” to have a migraine to get your sympathy. In fact, anyone who would suggest that as a reason probably lacks the required compassion required to provide sympathy to me. Sympathy can be nice, but what I seek is understanding and compassion.

11. “I wouldn’t take all those pain medications. Natural remedies are the only way to go.”

Well, I don’t love taking them either, but in the midst of a migraine I will honestly take whatever might possibly work. Natural remedies may help, but they do not alleviate the pain enough to rule out other medications that might. When you feel like your head is about to break open for three days straight, you are willing to take or do just about anything for relief.

12. “I have found this miracle shake (or supplement) — you should try it!”

And you sell it, only you really just want to recruit me to your downline and make me auto purchase the stuff for hundreds of dollars per month. I have heard it from a number of people who say they are not “salespeople” and are only trying to share information and help people.

No, you are trying to build a downline and are preying upon desperate people to do so. Honestly, if there was a cure for major diseases the word would spread and doctors would get on board (yes, there are still some who care more about their patients and a cure than anything else). While supplements and such may help, just like natural remedies, I do not believe you have found a cure that is only available to me if I join your “team.”

13. "My aunt (mother, sister, cousin) changed her diet and her migraines are gone."

I get it. You want to help. But honestly, I have tried avoiding certain foods and even have gone gluten-free, dairy-free and tried just about all the latest miracle diets out there. The result was that none of it prevented my migraines. There are very specific migraine trigger foods that I avoid, but I am not about to drink all my meals in a magic shake ever again only to learn weeks later it does not work.

I think people say some of these things to migraine sufferers because they simply do not think about what they imply or how their words can hurt or cause insult. The more awareness there is about the chronic condition, the more compassion and kindness can be offered in place of these disturbing remarks and suggestions.