How to Successfully Fight a Migraine Attack

by SARAH RATHSACK

Learning How to Treat a Migraine

I battle with chronic everyday migraines. I never wake up without one and never go to bed without one. The pain and symptoms ebb and flow throughout the day but I'm never below a three on the pain level scale.

Last weekend I had a level nine followed by a full day of level eight. During this time I wasn't sleeping — I was I passing out from the pain. While I was awake, it was a true battle of doing everything I could to fight the attack. What I do on a normal day to prevent and deescalate migraine versus during a high level attack are somewhat similar but to a bigger extreme.

There are certain things I've picked up over the years that can help fight a migraine when it comes on:

- **Everything needs to be silent.** During a smaller attack I try to distract myself with TV to push my mind to think of something else besides the pain. During an eight- to 10-hour attack I need complete silence.
- **Dark.** The tiny on/off light on my TV is even too bright. Coping with photophobia means I cover every bit of light and still cover my eyes.
- **Ice.** The pain needs to be numbed with cold and pressure. The locations that need to be iced each attack are different but some days it can be everywhere.
- **Blankets.** The ice makes me shake more and my body needs to be cocooned in blankets. I need to be able to throw them off because my temperature swings without notice.
- **My dog.** My dog needs to be pressing against me for comfort and added pressure. She lays very still, butts herself against me and kisses me when I move my fingers. She provides so much comfort that I can even block out her snoring.
- **Support.** My husband switches out ice, bringing meds, water and crackers. My daughter brings me heated wraps for my shoulders for the muscle tension. My mom and sister watch my kids — it takes a village to raise children and a village to fight migraines.
- **Medications.** I take a variety of pills, sprays and injections depending on the migraine. I throw up from the crashing pain from laying down to sitting up to get meds, so I take nasal sprays and injections at those times. The injections really hurt and give me undesirable side effects. Certain medications also cause me to have rebound headaches so I am very careful with what medications I take and when — it is a process that changes often.
- **Water and food.** Dehydration and hunger are some of my biggest triggers. I drink water and eat crackers that are often times thrown up and difficult to get down due to the extreme nausea. I need both food and water to allow me to recover, yet it doesn't sit well. As with medication, drinking and eating are a fine balance.

- **Lots of sleep.** The sleep allows me to escape the pain. Going to sleep is difficult once my migraine has reached an eight or nine; my body shakes like I'm having a conscious seizure. The pain is something indescribable, but sleeping is something I need. Sleep means different things to different people, and to me it's sanity, relief, recovery and a necessity.
- **Self-talk.** "You can do this." "Breathe, relax." The most effective thing for me is "You can do this." I've

gone through so many of these attacks that I try to escape the physical and tap into my soul. While enduring physical pain that seems too much, I tap into my super hero and convince myself to calm down and breathe deeply. Just getting my body still and calm enough to pass out is an accomplishment.

Recovery

Once your migraine has subsided it is time to try to recover — a whole other battle. In general, I am always battling before, during and after phases of migraine.

There are four potential phases of migraine: prodrome, aura, headache, and postdrome. All of the phases I experience and fight both individually and as a whole. Everyone fights in their own way and has success with different things. What are your tips to fight a migraine attack?