Coping With Light as a Migraine Trigger and What to Do About It

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Migraine Light Sensitivity and How to Cope

Like 80% of migraine sufferers, I suffer from photophobia. This is a condition that means we have migraine light sensitivity.

Different types of light can be painful: fluorescent lights, computers, phones, TV screens and natural light. I have pain associated with my light sensitivities and my threshold of light varies at different times. So, what can you do about it?

Dealing With Screens

Computer screens are harsh on eyes. If your eyes are strained, turn down the brightness of your screen and try to reposition the monitor so the light does not hit it directly.

I tend to turn off the overhead lights and use lamps that do not cause a glare on the screen, and try to look away from the screen at intervals so my eyes can adjust.

Avoid using technology before bed — the strain on your eyes may trigger a migraine even if you are sleeping, or may make it hard to fall asleep.

Incandescent Lights

Among the many other migraine triggers, migraines can be set off by the brightness and location of light. When I am out, the lighting is a big factor of where I can go and be comfortable.

I used to be able to go to a bar with a bunch of screens all around, but now I look for dim lighting. Places with huge TV screens, flashing lights, or other bright lights are places to avoid.

While dining, choose places with low lighting and indirect overhead bulbs. If you are seated in direct light, request a table that is more comfortable for your sensitivity and tolerance.

I am particular where lighting should be in my workspace. If the light bulbs are not covered or frosted, request that the light bulb directly above you be removed, shielded, or replaced with a burnt out bulb.

The flicker from fluorescent lights can quickly trigger or exacerbate a migraine. You can leave the fluorescent lights off and fill the room with less harsh lamps in a location that best fits your sensitivity.

For your home, look at examples of how certain bulbs glow before purchasing them to ensure your eyes are not triggered by the color or brightness. Also, use light fixtures that are covered, and if bulbs are clear, make sure they are frosted.

Use natural sunlight to light your room or house. I prefer blackout shades for a migraine, but for low-pain days I use light filtering shades and sit where there is no glare.

Try not to sit in direct light, since both the heat and light can be a trigger — filtered light is best.

Braving Outdoor Light

If you are outside, wear a hat and sunglasses to block additional light. I also tend to wear hoods to block peripheral light while riding in the car. When possible, sit in the shade.

Glasses are a good tool to help with photophobia. I used to wear sunglasses indoors but found it made my eyes more sensitive when I took them off.

Now, I use Axon Optics glasses with a FL-41 tinted lens. These lenses are rose colored and block wavelengths of blue-green light, which are a common migraine trigger. I use both the indoor and outdoor glasses to help reduce my light sensitivity.

The tint can be applied to most prescription and nonprescription glasses, along with contacts. I carry my Axon glasses in my purse and use them in the grocery store, in doctors' offices, in school and at work.

I like using light-filtering glasses because they are natural and provide immediate relief. You can wear them when you need them and take them off without side effects. It is a natural and simple way to treat your light sensitivity.

How to Tell if You Have Migraine Light Sensitivity

You may be sensitive to bright lights and not even know it. If you experience the symptoms listed below, you could very well be experiencing a light-induced migraine. You can try the coping techniques we talked about above, but you should also consult your doctor to receive a guided treatment plan.

Light-induced migraines may include these symptoms or behaviors.

- You have a sensitivity to artificial and natural light.
- Getting head pain after artificial or natural light exposure.
- Dry eyes.
- Irritated eyes.
- Experiencing less eye or head pain in low light.

In Conclusion

The position of workspace, location of lights and type of lights is crucial in lowering light-related migraine triggers. It seems like everywhere I go I am triggered by light, but using some of the techniques mentioned helps lessen my pain.

What light triggers you the most? How do you help limit light sensitivity?