# 13 Migraine Symptoms to be Aware of

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## Migraine Symptoms to be Aware of

I've been a migraine sufferer for 20 years now. I've discovered that after 20 years, there is still so much that I don't know. For example, did not you know that yawning can signify that you're about to have a migraine? Or that food cravings can occur before a migraine?

I didn't, but it all makes sense. All these years and all these little idiosyncrasies that I just accepted about myself, and they may possibly be attributed to my migraines. Friends – my mind is blown! The more we know, the better prepared we are to deal with migraines and the side effects that come along with them.

Remember, you should always talk to your doctor if you have specific questions or concerns about any side effects.

**Migraine Stages**

Migraines are divided into four stages – each of which has its own separate symptoms. If you're like me, you thought a migraine was just a migraine. Or an aura with a migraine, if you're one of those individuals who have an aura.

However, that is not the case!

The four stages of migraines are as follows:

**Prodrome stage**, also known as the premonitory stage. This stage can begin one hour to two days before a migraine starts. Common symptoms during the prodrome phase include:

- Cravings for sugary foods
- Thirst
- Mood changes, especially anxiety and depression
- Frequent yawning
- Irritability
- Constipation
- Tight and/or sore neck

**Aura stage** typically occurs shortly before a migraine. This stage does not happen for every person with a migraine – in fact, the aura stage occurs in approximately 30 percent of people with a migraine. An aura is typically a visual disturbance that lasts for 20 to 60 minutes. Common symptoms during the aura stage include:

- Ringing in the ears
- Speech problems or an inability to speak

- Seeing bright spots, flashes of light, vision loss, or seeing dark spots
- Tingling sensations in an arm or leg

**Main attack stage** is when the migraine occurs. The migraine lasts anywhere from a few hours to a few days. This is the stage that we're most familiar with – because we, as migraine sufferers *live here* and spend most of our time here. Common symptoms during the main attack stage include:

- Pulsating or throbbing pain on one or both sides of the head
- Extreme sensitivity to sounds, smells, or lights
- Nausea and vomiting
- Pain that worsens with activity
- Loss of appetite
- Lightheadedness
- Fainting
- Blurred vision

**Postdrome stage**, or recovery stage, occurs after the migraine ceases. This is when we begin to feel drained and tired.

**13 Migraine Symptoms**

Now that we know the stages of migraines, we can discuss migraine symptoms in greater detail. We'll generally discuss symptoms that can occur with migraines in general, but we will go into greater detail regarding symptoms that can signify a migraine is approaching – the prodrome stage.

**Mood Changes**

Mood changes can signify that a migraine is approaching. This can mean any mood swing – depression, irritability, or sudden excitement.

In fact, there is likely a link between the severity between the severity of depression and the severity of migraines. Data was presented at the American Academy of Neurology 2010 annual meeting that suggested that people with moderate to severe depression were more likely to have episodic migraines that became chronic.

Not only that, but there also may be a genetic link between depression and migraines – especially if the migraine sufferer has an aura.

**Stuffy Nose and Watery Eyes**

In a study funded by GlaxoSmithKline, a maker of migraine medication, it was found that many people complained of a sinus headache – and upwards of 90 percent of those people were actually experiencing a migraine.

Migraines can manifest in strange ways, such as clear nasal drainage, droopy eyes, a stuffy nose, and tearing.

**Food Cravings**

Have you ever craved food and given in, only to suffer from a migraine a short time later?

Well, a strong urge for food may be a symptom of the prodrome.

A 2003 study that spanned the US, UK, and Denmark evaluated migraineurs by asking them to keep a three-month migraine journal using a hand-held electronic device to record their symptoms. The participants logged that food cravings occurred in:

- Two percent before an attack
- One percent during an attack
- One percent after an attack

A 2001 study evaluated who cravings occurred to – migraineurs with aura, or migraineurs without. The study found that food cravings occurred in:

- Eight percent of people who had migraines with aura.
- Eighteen percent of people who had migraines with and without aura.
- Five percent of people who had migraines without aura.

What both research studies found is that food cravings can occur in any stage of migraines and that anyone with migraines can have food cravings, but that people with a migraine with aura or more likely.

*Next page: More migraine symptoms including yawning, neck pain, trouble speaking and more.*

**Yawning**

A 2006 study in *Cephalgia* found that 36 percent of study participants reported yawning as a precursor to a migraine. And we're not just talking about a yawn here or there – we're talking about repetitive yawning.

In early 2018, a study in *Headache* found that almost half of their study participants reported repetitive yawning during a migraine. They studied 339 people with migraines and found that yawning was common in 11.2 percent in the prodrome phase, 24.2 percent during the headache, and 10 percent in both stages.

People who have osmophobia (sensitivity to smell), nausea, vomiting, cutaneous allodynia (sensitive skin) all were more susceptible to excessive yawning.

**Neck Pain**

An online survey performed by the National Headache Foundation indicated that 38 percent of migraine patients "always" have neck pain and 31 percent "frequently" have neck pain during a migraine. Other studies indicate that up to 87 percent of migraine sufferers have neck pain before or during a migraine.

Neck pain can be a bit confusing – how do you know if you're having actual neck pain or pain that is simply associated with your migraine – although it makes it no less painful!

It could be that migraines some migraines *start* in the neck or the base of the skull. Why? We often carry our stress in our shoulders and neck, and tight muscles in these areas can indicate stress. It can also mean poor posture – another cause of neck pain and headaches!

**Trouble Speaking**

Trouble speaking, termed the "migraine babble" by migraineurs, is when the words just don't come out right. However, there is an actual medical term for this – "transient aphasia."

Not everyone with a migraine will have transient aphasia – it occurs in people who have a migraine with aura, complex migraine, and migraine with brainstem aura.

Not to confuse things, but typically, this "migraine babble" is often part of the migraine aura. If you begin to notice that you're not speaking clearly or you're searching for words, a migraine may hit soon. However, if this is a new symptom for you, it can also be a symptom of an impending emergency, such as a stroke – seek medical attention in these circumstances!

**Sleep Difficulties**

I don’t know about you, but when I have a migraine, I just want to sleep the pain away – but sometimes sleep is elusive.

Sleeping difficulties are prevalent in migraineurs. Waking up tired and having a hard time falling asleep is very common, as is having a hard time falling asleep once the migraine hits. Insomnia is common as a result of migraines.

There have been studies that indicate a “lack of restorative sleep and the frequency and intensity of migraines.”

Unfortunately, this cycle can actually trigger migraines.

**Numbness and Tingling**

Also called a sensory aura, numbness and tingling or a temporary lack of sensation occurs on one side of the body across the face or moving from the fingertips and through the arm. The sensory aura is less common than a visual aura – slightly less than one-tenth of migraineurs have a sensory aura.

The aura occurs immediately before a migraine begins; symptoms may last several minutes to one hour.

Just as we’re not sure what causes migraines, researchers aren’t sure what causes a sensory aura. One theory is that it may be caused by improper functioning in an area of the brain stem.

Sensory aura symptoms can be scary. They are similar to that of a stroke, a seizure, or a mini-stroke (transient ischemic attack – a TIA). For this reason, you should seek medical attention when you when you first begin to experience these symptoms to differentiate between emergency symptoms and sensory aura symptoms.

Once you can rule out an emergency, a medical professional, such as your neurologist, can help you differentiate between the symptoms. One way to discern the symptoms is to note the onset – sensory aura symptoms are gradual while the emergent symptoms are typically not.

**Vision Problems**

As we’ve already discussed, migraines affect the senses and vision is no exception. Many people have auras that signify a migraine is coming. Others have certain subtypes of migraines that specifically affect their vision, such as ocular migraines, retinal migraines, and ophthalmic migraines.

If vision changes occur, they can occur at any stage of the migraine – before, during, or after a migraine. Sometimes vision change is the only symptom that a migraine is occurring – occasionally, no pain occurs whatsoever.

Common visual symptoms include:

- Blurry vision
- A temporary loss of vision
- Double vision
- Sparkles in the vision
- Loss of peripheral vision
- Flickering lights in the vision
- Flashes, spots, and lines in the vision – all of which are very common with an aura
- Sensitivity to light (photophobia)

*Next page: More migraine symptoms to be aware of including nausea and vomiting, IBS, vertigo and more.*

**Nausea and Vomiting**

Two of the more common symptoms, nausea and vomiting, are very prevalent in migraineurs. A mail survey, the American Migraine Study II, which studied over 3,700 people with migraines, found that 73 percent had experienced nausea and 29 percent had experienced vomiting.

The National Headache Foundation's study, the American Migraine Prevalence and Prevention study, recently found that people who have frequent nausea that is associated with migraines have pain that is more severe and less receptive to medications than their counterparts without nausea.

The cause of nausea and vomiting with migraine is unknown. They are also often linked to vertigo and dizziness, so it is surmised that there may be an inner ear disturbance.

**Irritable Bowel Syndrome**

Just when you thought that your GI system was safe from migraines – you're wrong.

Migraine may also be linked to irritable bowel syndrome.

Irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS, is a common bowel disorder. It causes either constipation or diarrhea – sometimes both – and is uncomfortable for the person who suffers from it. And researchers have found that people with migraines are more likely to also suffer from IBS.

In fact, a 2005 study found that people with IBS are 25 percent more likely to suffer from headaches. Another study found that children who were treated for constipation had a subsequent improvement in their headaches.

What is the connection?

Possibly serotonin. "Serotonin in the brain is believed to be a cause of migraine. Meanwhile, the intestines are flooded with serotonin during constipation."

Another possible cause is the prevalence of psychological disorders; people with migraines are more likely to suffer from depression – and people with depression are more likely to have constipation. Also, depression is also linked to serotonin levels in the brain.

**Vertigo**

Another very common migraine symptom, anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of people may suffer from dizziness and/or balance issues. People with a migraine with aura are even more likely to have migraine-linked vertigo.

Some people with vertigo have a condition called vestibular migraines, which is a migraine that is linked specifically to inner ear issues. However, less than one percent fall into this category.

People with a migraine can experience vertigo at any stage of the migraine – before it occurs, during the migraine, and even when there is no migraine occurring.

Alicia Cook, of the food blog The Dizzy Cook, writes of vertigo, "Living with vertigo or ataxia symptoms caused by vestibular migraine reminds me of when I was young and would willingly go on those questionable, spinning state fair rides – the ones where you could hardly exit because you couldn't walk a straight line after. Only I couldn't just end that feeling by getting off the ride. It was a constant battle to keep my eyes open and try to focus them as best as I could."

**The Hangover**

At the completion of a migraine, do you feel like you just got done partying with your friends? Like you just spent

the weekend in Las Vegas?

Ahhh, yes. The migraine hangover.

Migraines are fatiguing. In fact, recent studies indicate that during the post-migraine period, it is common to feel a loss of energy, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, lightheaded, dizzy, and weak.

The “hangover” period is the postdrome stage. It can last up to 24 hours. Because it can last so long, some people can find it just as debilitating as the migraine itself – especially if the migraine was short-lived.

It is important to take time to recover from a migraine and rest during the postdrome; here are some tips on recovery.

**What Does a Migraine Feel Like?**

It is a misconception that a migraine is a headache – it *is* a headache, but it is so much more than just a headache, as we’ve discussed above.

So, what does a migraine feel like?

There are times when I am living with a daily headache – these headaches may be minor, but they are no less disrupting to daily life. It feels like there is a tight headband wrapped around my head and it is squeezing just *a little bit* too tight. Now imagine this feeling for days on end. Fun, right?

Then, there are the times when the migraine hits like a figurative ton of bricks. Excuse the cliché, but regardless of where the migraine strikes, it feels like I have been struck with a heavy object to my skull (perhaps even repeatedly) and that spot is throbbing. And the lights are oh so bright – and everything is so dang loud…

According to several community members from The Mighty, here are a couple of explanations of what a migraine feels like:

- “Light is like a million needles sticking you in the eyes. Sounds are amplified as if you’re in the front row of a rock concert. Did I mention it’s a band you hate? Smells that you normally find delightful make your stomach turn. The thought of food leaves you searching for a wastebasket. But the hardest part is the pounding in your head. It’s so intense, so debilitating, it makes you question your existence.”
- “I gave birth vaginally with no drugs. It hurt like hell. I’d rather do that again anytime that have a migraine. At least with birth I know it’s going to end at some point.”
- “For me, it usually feels like someone is trying to scoop my left eye out with a spoon. All day, every day after day after day.”

**The Bottom Line…**

Migraines are fraught with symptoms. And if you’re like me, you may not have known that some of your symptoms were even *related* to your migraine.

What’s more, the symptoms can be confusing! What symptoms are from the prodrome… what symptoms are attributed to the aura… What symptoms are from the migraine?

You can keep track of your migraines and your symptoms on an app like Migraine Buddy, which does a great job compiling data and asking for user data, such as symptomology about the prodrome and migraine stage.