Know When Migraine Is a Medical Emergency

by YVONNE BANKS

Should I Go for ER Migraine Treatment?

You may be hesitant about going to the emergency room when you have a horrible migraine. The ER personnel may seem to frown on the fact that you are there for "just" a “headache,” and you don’t want to go through that.

However, there are times you should seek medical attention, as there could be something else occurring that may not even be migraine-related. If you know what symptoms to look for, then you can make a better decision on whether you can be treated in the ER or call your physician.

When to Go to the ER

If the symptoms you have are new and unusual, you will want to go to the emergency room. Sometimes severe headaches can be from an aneurysm or meningitis, even a stroke. If you have the following symptoms accompanying your migraine, go to ER immediately.

- Vision loss or double vision
- Hallucinations
- Blind spots or flashing orbs of light
- Confusion
- Weakness
- Fever
- Migraine lasting longer than 72 hours
- Migraine that is more severe than usual
- Hypertension
- Sore neck muscles
- Rash
- Migraine pain that wakes you out of a deep sleep
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Abdominal cramps
- Numbness or tingling
- Speech slurring, stuttering, or muttering
- Seizure

If you have a headache and have been in a recent car accident or a fall, this is an emergency. Any head trauma needs to be reported when you go to the ER, just in case you have a subdural hemorrhage. You need to tell ER staff that you had been involved in an accident, so that you can be treated appropriately.

Getting Treated for Migraines at the ER

Many migraine patients will let a long period of time pass, for instance, days or weeks, before visiting the

emergency room. When the patient can’t deal with the pain anymore, then medical attention is sought.

Unfortunately, ER doctors do not specialize in migraine treatment. It is best to visit your migraine specialist in cases where your headache has become unmanageable but not unbearable. The ER personnel will do what they can to reduce your pain, but will refer you to your doctor to follow up. If it turns out the problem isn’t a migraine, but something more serious, a hospital admission may be needed.

When you visit the emergency room, tell them:

- All of your symptoms, especially those that are new and unusual for you.
- All of the medications you have taken in the past three days.
- If you know what has helped your bad migraines in the past, let the ER doctor know.

Next time you visit your migraine specialist, you can ask about what symptoms should be present before going to the ER. Knowing what to do when certain symptoms come up will help you decide when to utilize emergency services.