Why Men Should Seek Medical Help With Migraines

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Migraines in Men

Are more women than men afflicted with migraine headaches, or do more men typically avoid seeking medical help for their headache? Fact is, we may never know.

Statistics show that about three times as many women get regular migraine attacks compared to their male counterparts. But, there is also ongoing evidence that men tend not to seek advice from the medical profession about their condition and remain undiagnosed.

This is not uncommon in men, who statistically tend to get fewer annual checkups and avoid seeing their doctor for any health related issue unless they have a condition that they consider is urgent and in dire need of medical care or prescription medication. Headache, no matter how severe or persistent, may simply not qualify in a man’s viewpoint as a reason to see their doctor.

Many men may view seeking medical care as a weakness and a lack of control over their own body. Whether this is a societal impact or a genetic trait, a lot of men often feel compelled to simply push through any physical struggle when they are ill and see illness as a sign of weakness, negatively affecting their masculine persona.

The other issue at hand is that migraine is often viewed as "just a headache," and those who do not suffer from it often downplay it. Both male and females tend to avoid seeking that formal diagnosis, but women are more likely to eventually seek medical help.

About 16% of women have diagnosed migraines versus about 5% of men. Some studies show that around half of those that suffer regularly from migraine have not had a formal diagnosis.

Wondering what to do for someone with a migraine? Here's how to help the migraneur men in your life.

So Much More Than a Headache

The World Health Organization has rated migraine headache among the 20 most disabling lifetime conditions. Though millions of people are affected by it, migraine remains an invisible condition, and those afflicted by it often feel isolated.

Many just push through and hide the condition out of fear that others will not take the pain seriously. Men are guiltier of this than women, because without visual proof of their severe pain, they are far less likely to admit to their friends, family or coworkers that they are struggling with this condition.

Migraine affects the daily lives of both men and women who suffer from it. Studies estimate that between 10-20% of those with migraine headaches are unable to work due to an attack. The impact of the condition affects the overall quality of life more than other common conditions, like asthma.

Next page: how to tell if you're experiencing migraines, and why you should seek medical help if you are.

Is It a Migraine?

If you are a man who suffers debilitating headaches, you still might be reluctant to seek medical help. You may be asking yourself, “How do I know if it's a migraine?” Great question, because there are other types of headache that affect more men than women.

- **The Cluster Headache** – These affect about six times more men than women. They mostly affect men in their 20s or slightly older, and the majority are smokers. Attacks often begin at a similar time of day or night. During an attack there is a severe pain on one-sided of the head and is usually accompanies by one or more of these other symptoms: a blocked or runny nose, a droopy eyelid, watering and redness of one eye, a flushed or sweaty face, a unsettled, restless feeling. These headaches usually occur during a 4–12 week period called a “cluster or bout” and may only occur once or twice in a given year. Each cluster headache “attack” develops suddenly and typically lasts between 15 minutes and 3 hours (without treatment) each day. Most people are pain free between attacks.
- **Tension Headaches –** No surprise that when people feel tense it can affect their entire muscular system and cause them to tighten their jaws, shoulders and neck muscles. Men seem to hold in tension more than women, who are more likely to seek outlets of relief like massage or yoga. So, it is no surprise that men statistically get more tension headaches, a result of stress and tensed up muscles. These headaches are a non-throbbing, pressure pain in part or all the head, and may be associated with neck pain or tightness. They are often described as feeling like a "tight band" is contracting around the head, or feeling like the head is "in a vise." A tension headache usually does not produce nausea or sensitivity to light or sound. It is not made worse by routine physical activity, and is of mild or moderate pain intensity.

Migraine Headache Symptoms

There are specific characteristics of migraine pain that set it aside from other types of headache:

- The pain of a migraine is often on one side of the head, but can be on both, and is most often pulsating, pounding, or throbbing in sensation.
- Regardless of where pain begins, it often settles into a one-sided headache and often affects the neck as well.
- Often, migraine pain is made worse by routine physical activity, such as climbing stairs.
- The vast majority of migraines last between 4 hours and 72 hours.
- Sensitivity to sound, light and even smell. There is often nausea or loss of appetite.
- Many migraine sufferers have difficulty thinking or concentrating during an attack. Some experience dizziness, lightheadedness or vertigo.
- Auras are a neurologic symptom that can accompany or precede a migraine. They usually affecting your vision with blind spots, unusual colors or sparkles of light can be seen. An aura can also bring about stroke-like symptoms like numbness, tingling or weakness in the face. Most migraine auras last for 15 minutes to up to an hour.

Why Men Should Seek Medical Help With Migraines

Why should you go to your doctor to treat your migraines? Well, first reason would be that you might get some great solutions or medication to alleviate or ease the pain you are now managing on your own. But another fact you may not realize is that having migraines statistically increases a man’s risk of having a heart attack.

In fact, middle-aged men who suffer from migraines have a 42% increased risk of suffering a heart attack than those without migraines. Researchers do not yet know if that risk factor decreases if you are medically controlling your migraines with the help of your doctor, but being under the care of a physician helps to monitor that risk and facilitates a faster response to heart related symptoms when and if it becomes necessary.

Though it may seem like something you can handle on your own, migraines can be managed so much easier with the help of your doctor. Medications and treatments are available that can ease the level of pain you must deal with and often limit the number of attacks you suffer from.

Speaking with your doctor about your options can improve your quality of life, ease work-related issues migraines may cause, and even stay on top of possible heart attack risks.