



# MIGRAINE PATIENT TOOLKIT: LIVING WELL WITH MIGRAINE



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## ABOUT SWHR

The Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR®) is a nonprofit thought leader dedicated to promoting research on biological sex differences in disease and improving women's health through science, policy, and education. Founded in 1990 by a group of physicians, medical researchers, and health advocates, SWHR is correcting imbalances in health care for women by addressing unmet needs and research gaps in women's health. Thanks to SWHR's efforts, women are now routinely included in most major medical research studies and scientists are considering sex as a variable in their research. Visit [www.swhr.org](http://www.swhr.org) for more information.

## ABOUT SWHR'S INTERDISCIPLINARY NETWORK ON MIGRAINE

SWHR's Interdisciplinary Science Networks identify knowledge gaps and opportunities to effect change for diseases and conditions that disproportionately or differently affect women. Launched in 2018, SWHR's Migraine Network is a diverse group of researchers, health care providers, patient advocates, and health care opinion leaders working to educate and engage society about the burden of migraine.

In 2019, SWHR's Migraine Network published its first guide for individuals with migraine, "Migraine Patient Toolkit: A Guide for Your Care." SWHR's 2019 guide helps patients understand migraine diagnosis and treatment options and how to navigate the health care and insurance system. You can access the first toolkit on SWHR's [website](#).

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

04  
WELLNESS AND MIGRAINE

05  
PHYSICAL WELLNESS

07  
ENVIRONMENTAL WELLNESS

09  
SOCIAL WELLNESS

11  
WORK WELLNESS

13  
EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

15  
INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS

17  
GLOSSARY

19  
REFERENCES

20  
APPENDICES



# WELLNESS AND MIGRAINE

Wellness is a journey and a lifelong practice.

## HEALTH

THE ABSENCE OF DISEASE, THE ABILITY TO RECOVER FROM ILLNESS OR INFIRMITY, AND A STATE OF PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND SOCIAL WELLBEING



## WELLNESS

THE ACTIVE PURSUIT OF ACTIVITIES, CHOICES, AND LIFESTYLES THAT LEAD TO A STATE OF HOLISTIC HEALTH

Migraine is a chronic neurological disease that frequently causes intense, debilitating headaches as well as other symptoms such as nausea and sensitivity to light and sound.

For patients with **chronic** or **episodic migraine**, a variety of medical treatments are available to help prevent migraine attacks or interrupt an attack after it starts. Working with a physician to address physical symptoms is an important priority. However, people with migraine can also take steps to enhance their overall wellness to achieve a full and functional life.

Pursuing wellness in addition to working with your physician to achieve good physical health can help you to feel as though your life is not controlled by your migraine attacks.

This toolkit provides a guide for pursuing **wellness** and living your best life, even while dealing with migraine. We hope this guide helps you begin your journey toward living well with migraine.

## Wellness...

- Is multifaceted and multidimensional.
- Extends beyond physical health.
- Involves the active pursuit of a strong quality of life.
- Is dynamic — not just a state of being.

Balancing wellness across the following areas is possible, even for patients with migraine:



PHYSICAL



ENVIRONMENTAL



SOCIAL



WORK



EMOTIONAL



INTELLECTUAL

## A Guide for Your Migraine Care

If you need help understanding your migraine disease diagnosis and navigating the health care and insurance system, check out SWHR's first migraine toolkit on our [website](#).

# PHYSICAL WELLNESS

Physical wellness in the face of migraine-related pain and other physical symptoms may feel difficult to achieve. But focusing on the core tenets of physical wellness is possible, even when managing migraine.



You can think of these areas as the **SEEDS** to success in managing your physical wellness.

## SLEEP

Up to ½ of migraine patients have poor sleep quality or a sleep disorder like insomnia, restless leg syndrome, or sleep apnea. Sleep deprivation is one factor that may trigger a migraine attack.



### To achieve improved sleep quality:

- Go to bed and wake up at the same time daily.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine.
- Turn off electronic devices 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Use your bed only for sleep and sex.
- Reduce your fluid intake before bedtime.
- Avoid known sleep disrupters, including alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco.

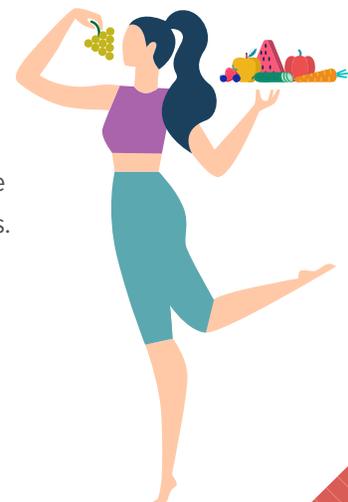
If sleep problems persist, talk to your physician. You can also consult a behavioral sleep medicine specialist trained to help people address insomnia and other sleep disorders. **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBTi)** is an evidence-based method of improving symptoms of insomnia. Find a provider [here](#).

## EAT

While some people find eliminating certain foods is helpful to manage attacks, there is no correct “migraine diet” that will work for every person with migraine. Rigid diets and one-size-fits-all elimination diets do not show much evidence in reducing headaches.

### Eating habits that may help:

- Eat regularly. Do not skip meals.
- Talk to your doctor if you want to consider addressing migraine attacks with dietary supplements, vitamins, herbs, or nutraceuticals.
- Carry a snack and water with you when you leave the house. Ask your doctor if they are willing to provide a note to share with your employer or school if you face restrictions on carrying these items.



# PHYSICAL WELLNESS (CONT.)

## EXERCISE

Engaging in physical activity can be complicated for individuals with migraine, but research suggests that the benefits outweigh the risks.

Regular, moderate-intensity physical activity may reduce frequency and severity of headaches and improve quality of life. There is no data to suggest that regular exercise makes migraine worse. The best exercise is an activity that you enjoy and can tolerate. But it is important to keep moving!



### To avoid migraine attacks during or after exercise:

- Practice good hydration.
- Eat a snack 30–60 minutes prior to exercise to prevent dips in blood sugar.
- Engage in a five-minute warm-up prior to any moderate or intense physical activity.
- Try low-impact activities such as swimming or water aerobics.

For patients with chronic illness, **activity pacing** can help prevent “overdoing it,” which may lead to a migraine attack. Interspersing periods of activity (e.g., cleaning, shopping, physical activity, even socializing) with periods of rest can help the body recover before moving on to the next endeavor.

## DRINK

Your drink choice may also affect your migraine attacks. Drinks that are sugary, caffeinated, or alcoholic may provoke attacks or worsen symptoms.

### It may be helpful to:

- Drink water throughout the day and avoid sugary drinks such as juice or soda.
- Keep caffeine use minimal, or consider avoiding it completely. Make changes slowly if you plan to reduce caffeine consumption.
- Consume alcohol in moderation.

Alcohol may trigger a migraine attack soon after consuming alcohol (within 30 minutes to 3 hours) or a delayed hangover-induced headache (typically the morning after drinking). Most people with migraine disease do not need to avoid alcohol completely, but should pay attention to which types of drinks might trigger an attack.

## STRESS

Remember to do your best to manage **stress**. Both routine, day-to-day stressors as well as acute and uncontrollable stressors

can affect migraine. We all have stress, but learning ways to cope with it can be helpful in limiting migraine attacks. For more, **see our section** on migraine and emotional wellness.



### Using a Headache Diary

It is often helpful to track your migraine attacks, along with migraine triggers. You can use **SWHR's Headache Diary** to help monitor all the important variables.



# ENVIRONMENTAL WELLNESS

For individuals with migraine, the environment can affect the frequency or strength of attacks. Certain environmental factors — referred to as “triggers” and often working in combination — may bring on an attack or worsen existing symptoms.



For individuals who do not have migraine disease, environmental factors are unlikely to trigger a migraine attack. Alternatively, it might require many **triggers** combined before they start to experience symptoms. But people with migraine disease have a much lower threshold: They might only need to experience one or two triggers before an attack is provoked or made worse.

Monitoring environmental factors can help you understand which triggers you can tolerate and which you may want to avoid. Not every person is affected by environmental factors, but some may feel particularly sensitive to changes in the environment. **Track your migraine attacks** to determine which environmental influences might play a role in your attacks.

## AT HOME

### Common triggers:



NOISE



SMELLS



STRESS

### What you can do:

- Limit outside noise (traffic, neighbors) and inside noise (vacuum, TV, radio) as much as possible.
- Ask people you live with who smoke to do so outside, away from entrances to the house, and wash their clothes separately.
- Avoid the use of harsh chemicals, detergents, and other household products, as these often have strong smells that may trigger migraine attacks.

### What is a weekend migraine?

Waking up to pain on a Saturday morning is not uncommon for those with migraine. As stress subsides after your work week, levels of stress hormones drop. Ironically, this can cause a migraine attack. Because of this pattern, these attacks are often referred to as “weekend” or “let down” migraine attacks.

Keeping to a steady routine during the weekend is important: Avoid oversleeping, which may trigger these migraine attacks. Try to bring stress-relief activities into your work week to avoid a buildup of stress from Monday to Friday. Yoga, easy walks, meditation, and deep breathing are good examples.



# ENVIRONMENTAL WELLNESS (CONT.)

## AT WORK

### Common triggers:



LIGHTS



SCREENS



POSTURE

### What you can do:

- Try to avoid sitting directly next to or under bright lights at work. Sunglasses or glasses with polarized lenses may help in more extreme scenarios.
- Use a glare monitor on your computer screen or adjust the monitor so glare is less bothersome for your eyes. Some people feel that special “blue-light blocking” glasses are useful for reducing eye strain when using electronic screens.
- Take breaks from the computer to stand, walk, or move around — this is good for both your eyes and your posture.
- Follow the 20/20/20 rule. Every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away from your screen for 20 seconds.
- Practice good posture when working, and consider using a headset when talking on the phone.

## OUTSIDE

### Common triggers:



WEATHER



ALTITUDE



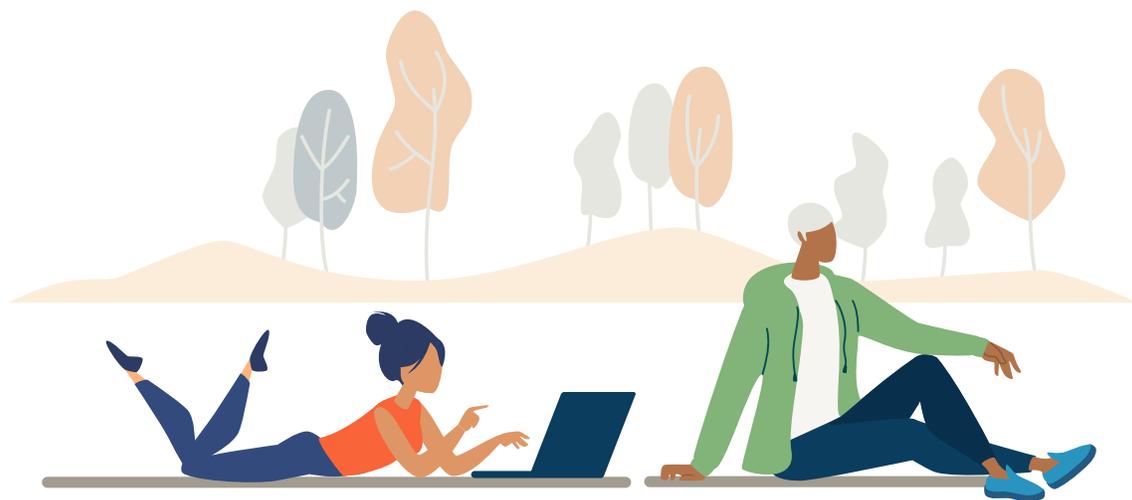
HEAT/ SUNLIGHT



POLLUTION

### What you can do:

- Monitor weather, barometric pressure, and air pollution levels. You may be able to proactively take some medications if you know a storm or change in weather is coming. Talk to your doctor about how best to track this.
- Wear sunglasses or a hat when you know you will be in the sun.
- Stay hydrated — dehydration is a common side effect on hot, sunny days, and can also trigger a migraine attack.
- Pay attention while traveling to changes in altitude. Your health care provider can talk to you about options for easing symptoms of altitude adjustment and related migraine attacks.
- Avoid going outside for long periods of time on days with high levels of air pollution.



# SOCIAL WELLNESS

Migraine can affect your relationships with family, friends, and coworkers, but a strong social support network can also help you maintain a high quality of life.



## Talking about migraine can be difficult

Migraine disease is often misunderstood or dismissed by people who don't fully understand its impact. People with migraine may experience **stigma**, which can cause additional negative mental or physical health symptoms.

You have the power to decide how you address concerns about stigma. Some people prefer to keep their migraine symptoms private, while others address stigma by sharing about their migraine attacks and advocating for change.

If you wish to discuss your experience, try creating your “migraine elevator speech” to introduce your friends to migraine disease in a way that destigmatizes your symptoms. Learn more about advocacy in the **intellectual wellness section** of this toolkit.



## How to talk about migraine with friends and family:

- Consider the benefits and risks of sharing. For example, sharing may help you find great sources of social support, but it may also leave you responding to a great deal of unsolicited advice. Think about sharing carefully, and make a decision that feels good to you.
- Talk to loved ones about migraine when you are not in pain. This will make the conversation easier for you and them. It may be helpful to share how you are doing, what symptoms you experience, and how they can help you better cope with migraine.
- Encourage them to ask questions and share concerns. Helping them to learn about migraine will help you to both feel empowered.
- Concentrate on your language choices. Let them know how you feel, but avoid placing blame or disappointment on others. If conversation becomes too hard, table it and return to the topic another time.

**See our appendices for tips on how to talk to a loved one dealing with migraine.**

# SOCIAL WELLNESS (CONT.)

## What about unsolicited advice?

Unfortunately, many people with migraine or other chronic health conditions are used to hearing advice from others about how best to handle their symptoms. Sometimes this advice may be helpful, but it may also be frustrating to hear. Take what works, and feel free to leave the rest.



### SAMPLE SCRIPT

Thank you so much for caring. I have a pretty specific treatment plan with my doctor, so I try to stick to that carefully.

Sometimes you may need to decline invitations or leave an event early to prevent an attack or avoid making symptoms worse. Saying “no” can be a good choice for your health and wellness in these scenarios, even if it’s difficult.



### SAMPLE SCRIPT

I’m so sorry I have to miss this. I wish I could be there. I’d love to take you out for a cup of tea next week so I can hear all about it.

## How to talk about migraine with children:

- Children are likely to be more fearful than adults. They may worry migraine disease could kill you, that migraine is contagious, or that they cause you to have migraine attacks when they misbehave. Normalizing their concerns while providing age-appropriate information can go a long way to ease their fears.
- Plan for what to do the next time you are not feeling well. Giving children an important task — anything from bringing a glass of water to assisting with chores — can help them to feel involved and productive, instead of worried or upset.
- When migraine attacks cause you to cancel plans, work together to find an alternative. It is helpful to teach children how to set boundaries and say “no” when you are under the weather, but giving them an alternative to canceled plans will also give them something to look forward to.



### SAMPLE SCRIPT

I’m sorry I’m not feeling well. It can be a little scary to see your Mom under the weather, but I will feel better once I get some rest and quiet time. I’m disappointed that we can’t go to the movies today, but let’s plan to go to the park tomorrow instead. In the meantime, I’d love it if you could grab a glass of water for me and then you can watch your favorite movie while I rest.

# WORK WELLNESS

No matter when, where, or how you work, migraine can interfere with your productivity and ability to perform both at work and at school.



113 M

WORKDAYS IN THE U.S. ARE LOST  
TO MIGRAINE ANNUALLY

\$13 B

COST TO EMPLOYERS FOR  
LOST WORKDAYS

#2

MIGRAINE IS THE #2 CAUSE OF LOST WORK DAYS

90%

OF PEOPLE WITH MIGRAINE FEEL THEY  
CANNOT FUNCTION NORMALLY AT WORK WHEN  
THEY HAVE AN ATTACK

## How to talk about migraine with your employer:

Consider the benefits and risks of disclosure, and remember how you tell the story matters. Some managers and coworkers may be very supportive and go out of their way to accommodate your symptoms in helpful ways. Some workplaces may be less migraine-friendly. Take the time to get to know the people you work with before making a decision about how much to share based on a careful consideration of the pros and cons.

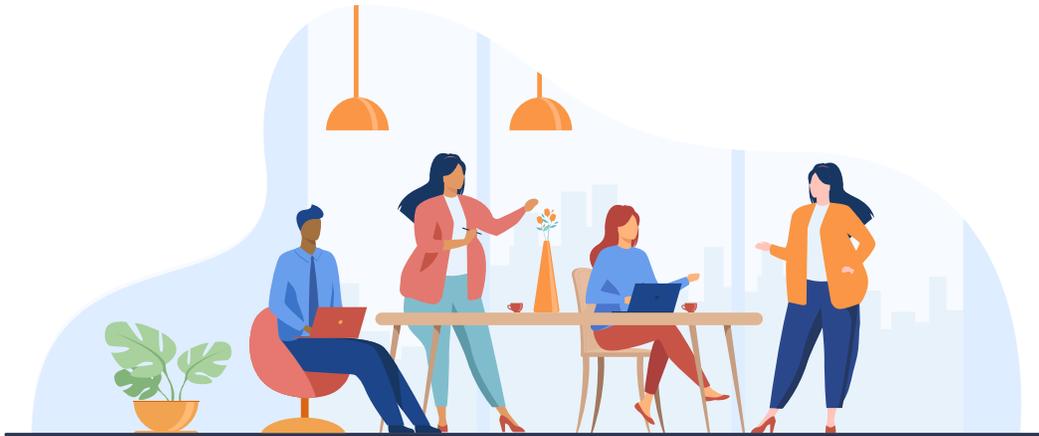
Some individuals with migraine may qualify for workplace protection under the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**. Migraine disease may be covered if it significantly impairs your ability to complete one or more major life activities. Talk to your employer, human resources office, or ADA representative at work to see whether you may qualify for accommodations under the ADA. Even if you do not meet the criteria for a disability, many workplaces will still make accommodations when and if they are able. Talk to your employer about how they may be able to help you succeed at work in spite of migraine symptoms.

## Some accommodations your workplace may be able to provide:

- Lighting adjustments
- Noise reduction or quiet rooms
- Teleworking
- Flexible work schedules
- Light filters for overhead or desk lights
- Antiglare filters for computer monitors
- White noise machine or headphones
- Air purification system
- Fragrance-free work policy
- Chair that supports good posture
- Choice of workspace



## WORK WELLNESS (CONT.)



### ! Remember, it is OK to need time to recover.

Talk to your physician if a note from them would be useful in obtaining accommodations at work.

Understand when you can and cannot use leave under the **Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)**. FMLA covers workers who are sick or who need to take time to take care of sick family members. FMLA will typically provide 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave with continuation of insurance coverage for individuals with a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform essential work responsibilities.

FMLA can be very useful for individuals managing migraine, but it is only applicable for covered employers and eligible employees.

Talk to your employer or find out more about [FMLA online](#).



### How to talk about migraine with your peers:

It may be useful to help those you work with understand your health needs. Small explanations may be useful in normalizing behaviors they might otherwise see as confusing.

Start with small requests or changes at work to gauge how they go over with coworkers and supervisors. Seeing how coworkers react to you wearing blue light glasses at the computer or how your boss responds to questions about how to get a more ergonomic chair can help you plan to make bigger requests like working at home or taking flex time for health appointments.

#### SAMPLE SCRIPT

I need to bring a snack into meetings because when I get low blood sugar, it can trigger a migraine attack. If I need to eat it, I can step outside quickly. I wanted to let you know so you understand if that happens.



Never feel pressured to explain more to coworkers than you are comfortable sharing. For some people, it can be helpful to share a lot about migraine. Others may feel uncomfortable explaining any part of their diagnosis or treatment. Consider your audience carefully, and remember that setting boundaries is perfectly acceptable.

# EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Migraine can affect your emotional wellbeing, but you can build emotional resiliency and develop healthy coping strategies to better manage your mental health.

Migraine and stress are often linked. One does not necessarily cause the other, but they frequently go hand in hand. Individuals with migraine also have above-average rates of certain psychiatric disorders, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, panic disorders, and suicidal ideation. It is important to treat both migraine as well as any comorbid conditions, including any psychological symptoms.

70% +

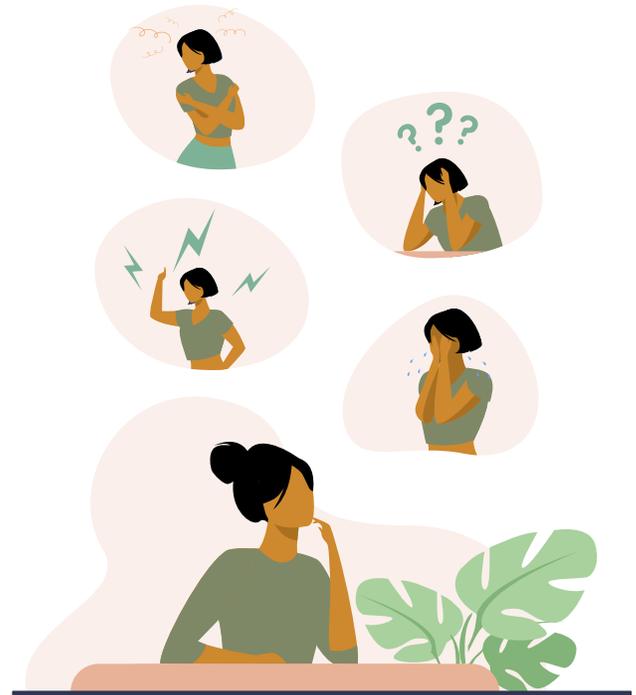
**OF MIGRAINE PATIENTS EXPERIENCE  
STRESS-RELATED ATTACKS**

25% +

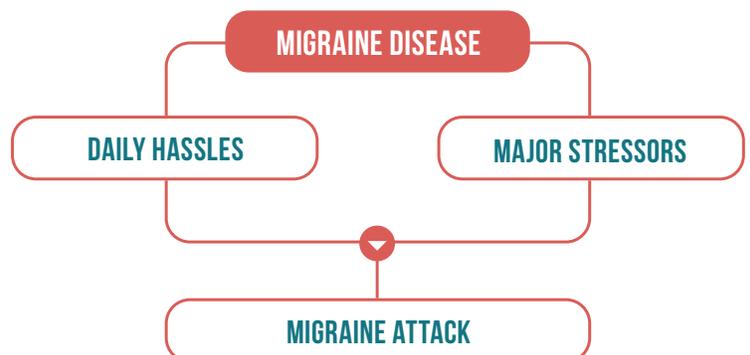
**OF INDIVIDUALS WITH MIGRAINE MEET THE  
CRITERIA FOR A MOOD OR ANXIETY DISORDER**

## Understanding migraine and stress

With migraine, stress can interfere with your life in multiple ways. Migraine can cause ongoing stress due to long-term activation of the body's chronic pain response systems, in addition to the emotional effects of pain interfering with personal plans and priorities.



On the other hand, ongoing and/or unpredictable stress — for example, trouble at home, with friends, or at work — can trigger a migraine attack. The body's physiological response to a migraine attack can in turn cause increased vulnerability to pain in the future, as the body adapts to what it perceives as signals of distress.



# EMOTIONAL WELLNESS (CONT.)

What can you do to improve your quality of life, manage your migraine attacks, and improve your mental health in the face of migraine disease? Try adding the strategies below to your preventative and abortive medications — a combined medical and behavioral approach often has the best results.

## Biofeedback

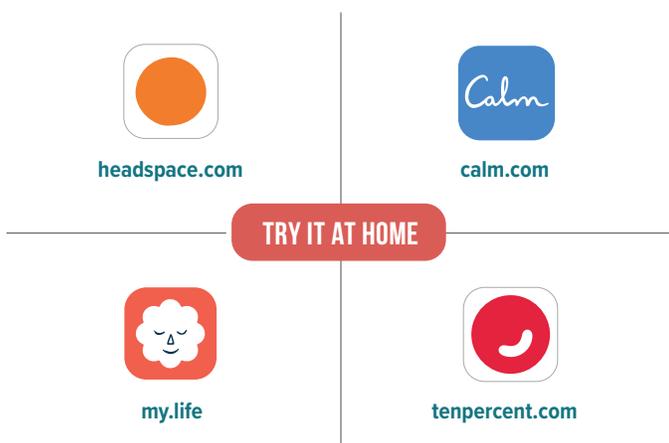
**Biofeedback** is a method of helping patients learn to monitor and control physical responses to stress or pain using relaxation techniques. A trained practitioner will use sensors to monitor biological data such as heart rate and breathing. Biofeedback has been shown to reduce frequency of migraine attacks. Most patients are able to see results fairly quickly.

Find a biofeedback practitioner on the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback's website ([aapb.org](http://aapb.org)).

## Relaxation

Guided **relaxation** can help to slow heart rate, lower blood pressure, and manage hyperventilation during times of stress or pain. You can learn relaxation techniques with the help of a trained practitioner, or you can try it on your own using web- and app-based options. Relaxation plus preventative medicine may be a helpful combination. Talk to your physician about options.

Meditation is a practice that involves some forms of guided relaxation (e.g., deep breathing), as well as intentional opening of the mind and the release of negative thoughts.



Find a variety of guided meditations and relaxation exercises for migraine and pain management here: [dawnbuse.com/relaxation](http://dawnbuse.com/relaxation)

## Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** is a type of psychotherapy shown to reduce stress related to migraine. It may decrease migraine attack frequency and associated disability, as well as improve quality of life, management of stress, and some comorbidities.

CBT administered by a trained behavioral health professional (e.g., psychologist, counselor, or social worker) can help patients identify and change dysfunctional ways of thinking and increase healthy behaviors.

Check out the **appendices** at the end of this toolkit for help finding a behavioral health provider and for tips on how to access behavioral care.



## If You Need Immediate Support

**Never be afraid to reach out for support. You are not alone.**

If you ever feel the distress you are experiencing is too much to handle, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline offers free, 24/7 services to people experiencing emotional or mental health crises.

**Call any time you need support: 1-888-273-8255**

For Spanish speakers, you can call a Spanish-speaking crisis prevention team at 1-888-628-9454. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can ask for support on the general hotline number, use an online chat ([suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)), or call a specialized TTY hotline at 1-800-799-4899.

# INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS

Intellectual wellness refers to your active participation in mentally-stimulating activities and seeking out new cultural and community experiences. Intellectual wellness can help you to live a full and exciting life, and allow you to feel better connected to your community and support network.



For people with migraine, having migraine-friendly activities and goals may help you to feel as though you are less limited by your disease.

## Mindful Attention

Focusing intentionally on activities that promote intellectual wellness can serve as a distraction from certain symptoms and low-intensity pain.

The **capacity theory** suggests that each of us has only a certain amount of energy we can expend on processing internal and external stimuli. Pain or migraine symptoms are one set of stimuli, but an activity like playing chess or crafting requires your attention in a way that may prevent you from spending all of your attention focusing on your pain.

Researchers have shown that playing a challenging memory game not only distracted participants from giving conscious attention to their body's pain messages, but may have also released natural painkillers that blocked incoming pain signals from being processed.

The bottom line: The more you are able to focus on rewarding activities, the more difficult it is to focus on low- or moderate-intensity symptoms.

**Try this:** Make a list of activities you can engage in during low, moderate, and high levels of symptom intensity. The next time you feel pain, pick an activity on your list to see whether you can use mindful attention to temporarily reduce symptom intensity. This may be particularly helpful to try while you are waiting for acute medications, like triptans, to take effect.

## Do migraine attacks cause cognitive impairment?

You may experience brain fog or difficulty thinking during a migraine attack. Try to engage in simple, non-stressful activities if you are experiencing mild cognitive impairment to avoid making symptoms worse. If you experience serious cognitive impairment, talk to your doctor immediately.

# INTELLECTUAL WELLNESS [CONT.]

Do you want to be a migraine patient advocate? Speaking out about your diagnosis and how communities can better support people with migraine can be empowering and help you learn a variety of new skills.

## WHAT IS MIGRAINE ADVOCACY?



Promoting policies to improve the quality of life for people with migraine in your local schools, workplaces, and government.



Sharing your story with your community and loved ones, so they better understand the experiences of individuals with migraine.



Pushing for policy change at a national level to improve big-picture issues such as funding for research, paid leave, and health care training.

“I advocate because it is important to utilize my voice in a way where it will shine a light on everyone who lives with this disabling neurological disease. So many of us live in the dark, trying our best to navigate through life with an unpredictable and life-stealing illness. It is important that the world sees the true impact migraine has on the millions of people living with it, not only in this country but across the globe.”

Jaime Sanders, The Migraine Diva  
[Practical Pain Management](#)

See more from migraine patient advocate **Jaime Sanders** at her website, [themigrainediva.com](http://themigrainediva.com).

## Get involved

There are a variety of ways you can be a migraine patient advocate.



**Keep it simple:** Advocate from home by sharing your experiences on social media or even starting a blog. Check out [Move Against Migraine](#) to connect with others and share your story.



**Go bigger:** Participate in a community race or fundraiser to raise money for migraine research, such as with the organization [Miles for Migraine](#).



**Or go bigger still:** Check out [Headache on the Hill](#), an annual advocacy event in Washington, DC, organized by the Alliance for Headache Disorders Advocacy.

To find other migraine advocacy groups, try [CHAMP](#), the Coalition for Headache And Migraine Patients, which coordinates advocacy efforts across organizations. Take a look at their event schedule and don't forget to sign up for their newsletter. You can also look into the [National Headache Foundation](#) and [American Migraine Foundation](#).

# GLOSSARY

- **Activity pacing** — A strategy to modify activity frequency or intensity among patients with chronic pain or other long-term conditions (including migraine). The goal of activity pacing is to intersperse periods of moderate activity with short to medium periods of rest in order to reduce cycles of overactivity and underactivity.
- **Advocacy** — The act or process of supporting a cause, proposal, or set of policies. For patients with migraine, advocacy often involves speaking out about your experiences with migraine and talking to local or federal representatives about how they might best support the migraine community.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** — Passed in 1990, the ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in areas such as school and work. Under the ADA, migraine disease may be considered a disability if your physician provides records stating that the physical impairment resulting from migraine attacks significantly limits one or more major life activities.
- **Behavioral treatment** — An umbrella term for various types of therapies that treat mental health symptoms or disorders. Behavioral therapies seek to address behaviors that may be maintaining or aggravating mental health symptoms.
- **Biofeedback** — A technique used to bring awareness and control to body functions, such as heart rate and breath. Sensors help patients receive information about their body (e.g., muscle tension) that they can use to consciously make subtle changes (e.g., relaxing muscles).
- **Capacity theory** — The idea that individuals have a limited ability to process sensory information. Mindful attention to alternative activities, therefore, can at times be helpful in reducing the experience of pain.
- **Chronic migraine** — Characterized by having more headache days than not (i.e., 15 or more headache days every month for at least three months).
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** — A type of behavioral treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of mental health symptoms as well as for addressing symptoms of chronic pain. The goal of CBT is to bring awareness to patterns of thinking or behaviors that provoke or intensify feeling of distress, in order to ultimately promote positive behavior change.
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBTi)** — An approved behavioral treatment to address symptoms of insomnia without the use of medication. CBTi is a structured program that can help you identify and replace thoughts or behaviors that cause or worsen sleep difficulties with habits that promote better quality sleep.
- **Episodic migraine** — Characterized by having less than 15 headache days every month. High frequency: 9–14 headache days per month. Low frequency: 0–8 headache days per month.
- **Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)** — Provides certain eligible employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave on an annual basis and allows employees to maintain health care coverage during their time away. FMLA applies to all public agencies, private and public-school employers, and companies with 50 or more employees.
- **Health** — A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
- **Migraine attack** — Characterized by moderate to severe head pain, lasting 4–72 hours (if left untreated), and often accompanied by symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, dizziness, aura, sensitivity to light and sound, and pain in the face and neck.
- **Migraine disease** — A chronic neurological disease in which a person has had at least five migraine attacks in their lifetime.
- **Migraine trigger** — Some change, event, lifestyle factor, or environmental influence that precedes a migraine attack.
- **Mindful attention** — A receptive awareness of and attention to activities taking place or emotions experienced in the present moment.

- **Relaxation** — A process to decrease the effects of stress on your mind and body. Guided relaxation allows you the assistance of a trained professional (either in person or via audio or video recording) in slowing down the sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for producing the stress response.
- **Stress** — A feeling of emotional or physical tension. Daily stress is the short-lived experiences of stress that occur on a regular basis, often stemming from everyday responsibilities. Chronic stress is long-term and open-ended, and can have serious impacts on physical and emotional wellbeing. Examples of chronic stress might include the experience of living in poverty or being unemployed.
- **Stigma** — A socially and culturally embedded process through which individuals (such as people who have migraine) experience stereotyping, devaluation, and discrimination. Stigma potentially impacts quality of life, behavior, and life chances.
- **Weekend migraine** — Also referred to as “Saturday syndrome” or “let-down headaches,” these attacks are triggered by a change in routine, such as those changes that occur from Friday night to Saturday morning during a work week (e.g., sleeping later, eating different foods, and drinking alcohol or caffeine in different amounts or at different times).
- **Wellness** — More than a state of physical health, wellness is a dynamic journey to achieve wellbeing across a variety of areas, including environmental, physical, social, intellectual, work, and emotional realms.

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# FINDING A BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

There are many different types of therapists. Think about what would be most helpful, and find someone who is the best fit for you and your needs.



If you would like to find a behavioral health professional to help you address stress or difficult emotions related to migraine, there are a variety of ways you can find help.

1. **Ask your primary care provider or neurologist.** A neurologist in particular may be able to recommend a therapist who specializes in chronic pain and/or headache issues.
2. **Talk to a friend.** Word-of-mouth is still one of the best ways to find a therapist who is convenient to you and recommended by those you trust.
3. **Use an online resource.** The American Psychological Association's Psychologist Locator website ([locator.apa.org](https://locator.apa.org)) allows you to find providers based on your location. Filtering by practice area also lets you identify psychologists trained in "health & wellness" and "chronic pain." Psychology Today ([psychologytoday.com/us/therapists](https://psychologytoday.com/us/therapists)) also has a therapist locator that allows you to browse local psychologists, counselors, and social workers.
4. **Visit your health insurance website or call your insurer.** By speaking with your insurance company, you can determine what coverage it offers for behavioral and mental health care. Your insurer also can provide a list of mental health providers in the area that accept your insurance.

Once you have a list of potential therapists, call a few to determine if they are accepting patients. If they are able to see you, it can be helpful to ask:

1. **What types of cases do you specialize in?**  
Finding a therapist who specializes in health psychology, chronic illness, or chronic pain will be helpful in managing migraine.
2. **What kind of therapy do you practice?**  
CBT has the strongest research support for migraine prevention. There are many different theoretical orientations practiced by clinicians, so it may be useful to understand how your therapist might approach your concerns before getting started.
3. **Have you seen cases like mine before?**  
Regardless of the provider's specialty, if they have seen many chronic pain, chronic illness, and/or migraine cases, they are more likely to be a good fit.
4. **How do you handle insurance?**  
Some therapists take insurance, and some do not. Some partner with only one or two insurers. Make sure you ask whether they accept your insurance. If they don't, it may be useful to call your insurer to see what you will be able to get reimbursed.

# WHAT IF I HAVE TROUBLE ACCESSING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE?



**Search the Psychology Today website** for therapists who accept patients using a sliding scale or income-based payments. You can also use the Open Path Psychotherapy Collective website ([openpathcollective.org](https://openpathcollective.org)) to find a provider offering sessions from \$30–\$60.



**Ask your doctor** about free or low-cost mental health clinics. Many cities have local options staffed by trainees and supervised by licensed clinicians where the services may be free or very low cost.



**Find an app.** Options like Talkspace ([talkspace.com](https://talkspace.com)) and Betterhelp ([betterhelp.com](https://betterhelp.com)) let you work with a therapist online or via text message. Rates are likely to be lower than seeing an in-person provider.



**Look for a support group.** A migraine or chronic illness support group is a great resource for both social and emotional support. Your primary care provider, neurologist, or even a local hospital might be able to help you find a support group.

# WHAT IF MY LOVED ONE HAS MIGRAINE?

Remember that migraine is a disease and is nobody's fault. Individuals with migraine do not bring their migraine attacks upon themselves, and sometimes there is nothing they can predict about their pain. It is easy to feel rejected or disappointed if they turn down spending time together when they are not feeling well. Don't take it personally, though. It is likely they would prefer to spend time with you but simply don't have a choice when they are feeling the symptoms of a migraine attack.

1.

## Ask what may trigger your loved one's migraine attacks.

Try to avoid having conversations in the midst of an attack, but later, when they are not in pain, you might ask questions like:

- Did you feel that migraine attack coming on?
- Do you think anything triggered that attack?
- Was there anything I could have done to be more helpful in managing your pain?

2.

**Consider their triggers.** Does your loved one have a sensitivity to smell? Sounds? Light? Certain foods? Try to remember what may bring on their migraine attacks and help minimizing these activities. This might mean not wearing cologne, finding new restaurants, or spending time indoors instead of out.

3.

**Encourage open-ended communication about what migraine feels like.** Let them know you are open to talking whenever they feel up to it. If they do want to share, you can ask questions such as:

- What does it feel like before, during, and after an attack?
- What kind of emotions do you experience related to migraine?
- What can I do to be supportive of you during these experiences?

4.

**Learn how to help when an attack is coming on.** It may be helpful to get them water and a snack, to find a quiet, dark space, or to help them take their medications. Creating a "migraine plan" with your loved one will make sure you both know what to do when they begin to experience symptoms.

5.

## Share in their health care appointments and treatment plan.

To the best of your abilities, offer support in attending health care appointments. Presenting a united front can make it feel like a team effort, as opposed to a challenge your loved one must face alone. Ask if you can help with picking up medications, keeping track of a treatment schedule, or processing the outcomes of health care appointments.

6.

**Focus on the good.** It can be easy to feel defeated, frustrated, or sad when you see your loved one suffering. Practicing gratitude and focusing on the things they are able to do instead of the things they can't will help remind both of you that there is life outside of migraine.

7.

**Seek your own support.** Even caregivers need a support system. If you are the support system for your loved one, you may be wondering where you can turn when you need validation and reassurance. Finding other family members or friends with whom you can share your struggles is important for your own mental health. Similarly, you may be able to find support with other caregivers or find a support group of your own.