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## Help for Patients Who Suffer from Migraine Headaches

*Migraines are more common than most patients think—for example, most “sinus” headaches are actually migraines. Migraines commonly cause sinus pain and pressure and can be triggered by weather changes. Migraines often cause a stuffy nose, and in some people, even clear nasal drainage.*

The nerves that “feel” the sinuses go to an area of the brainstem very close to a group of cells we call the “migraine generator.” Thus, weather changes can affect the sinuses and trigger a migraine, and a migraine can also trigger sinus pain and pressure—even without a “head” ache.

Migraines also can cause painful muscle spasms in the back of the head, the neck, the forehead and temples. The difference between tension headaches and migraines certainly is not as simple as once thought. Patients who experience frequent, severe “tension” headaches most often have migraines.

Muscle tension can cause head and neck pain, but it can also trigger a migraine; the migraine, in turn, can perpetuate muscle tension. Breaking this cycle is critical.

Migraine symptoms often include visual changes, fatigue, nausea, dizziness, numbness, and tingling. Though rare, a migraine sufferer may have no headache at all—just symptoms like those listed previously. These complicated migraines can mimic much more serious diseases. Since there is no test that “proves” a migraine diagnosis, a

headache specialist should be consulted.

Depending on individual circumstances, diagnostic tests are sometimes necessary to exclude other causes of the symptoms.

Fortunately, recent advances in migraine treatment have proven successful. Preventive medications often reduce the frequency of migraines, while other medicines are designed specifically to stop migraine attacks. Herbs and vitamins may also assist in migraine management. Most often, the frequency and severity of migraines can be reduced so that quality of life can be increased.

Scientific evidence supports some non-prescription migraine prevention and/or management: cardiovascular exercise five days a week (e.g., a 30-minute walk), daily relaxation techniques, drinking plenty of water, eating regular small meals, getting regular sleep, avoiding cigarette smoke, and restricting caffeine use. Some foods and additives such as MSG and NutraSweet (aspartame) can trigger migraines, as can smells associated with artificially scented perfumes, air fresheners and candles.

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