

## Your Doctor and Your Headache - A Vital Partnership

The World Health Organization recently declared headache a disability noting that 'both the public and the majority of healthcare professionals tend to perceive headache as a minor or trivial complaint'. Many headache sufferers do not consult a doctor. A recent US study showed that 50% of migraine sufferers had not sought medical advice and had not been diagnosed with migraine. As a result, they were not being treated for migraine.

Many people are disabled by headache. They may receive sympathy from relatives, friends and colleagues but this does not ease the pain. They may take various medications that do not really help. They may have consulted a doctor once and been prescribed medication that was not very effective.

It is important you consult your doctor to diagnose your headache. Any severe or constant headache that begins suddenly and is accompanied by weakness, dizziness, numbness or other strange physical sensations should be reported to a doctor immediately.

Your doctor should be consulted if you have frequent debilitating headaches or take an excessive number of pain relievers. The appointment should be made to specifically discuss the headache. To prepare for the appointment, complete the Helping Your Doctor Treat Your Headache questionnaire to assist your doctor to diagnose and treat your headache. Keeping a Headache Diary for three months prior to your appointment will assist you in completing the questionnaire.

The role of your doctor is to accurately diagnose your headache and then to work with you to help minimise the effect it has on you and your lifestyle. Recommending medication is a part of this process. As with any medical problem, it is important to receive the best possible medical advice. You may find that your local doctor may not have enough specialized knowledge about headache or may not take headache seriously. Make sure your doctor is aware of the disability caused by headache to your quality of life and how it affects your partner, children, employer, work colleagues and friends. Tell your doctor of this burden so your doctor can help. Your doctor may refer you to a specialist neurologist.

Headache management is a great challenge. A number of treatment options, preparations and methods of administration may have to be tried to discover what works best for each headache sufferer. The role of the doctor is vital in this process. Once your headache is correctly diagnosed, your headache management plan can be developed. The plan should be evaluated and updated regularly.

Patient-doctor communication is vital for the best outcome. This depends on both the patient and the doctor. Studies reveal that often the patient complains about the severity of the pain,

the doctor reassures the patient and prescribes medication, this may or may not be adequate for the severity of the headache, there is no follow-up so the doctor assumes that the headaches are no longer a problem, and the patients assume the doctor isn't interested or has nothing else to offer. Effective communication on both sides can result in a trial-and-error process that leads to effective treatment that will minimize the pain and disability associated with headache.

## References

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