

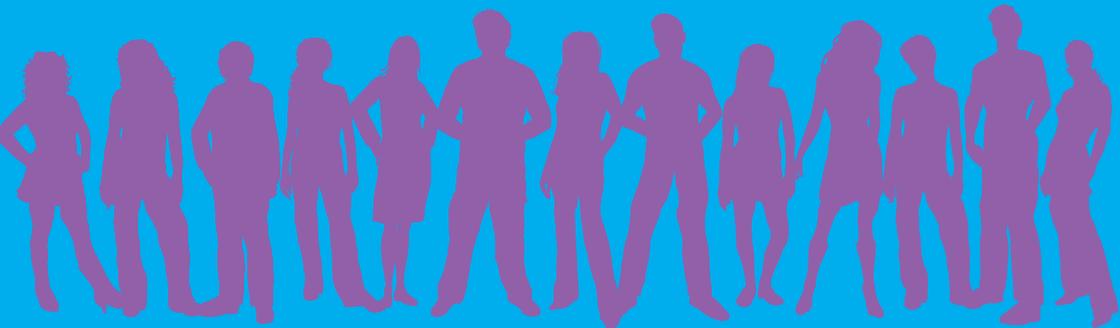
# MIGRAINE ADVICE FOR TEENS



Are you experiencing regular headaches?  
Do you feel that they are starting to control your life?



the  
**migraine**  
trust





**If you feel a migraine attack coming, the earlier you start trying to stop it the better. One of the first things to do when you feel an attack coming on is to tell someone about it**

## You are not alone

Seven out of every ten people in your school or college will have a headache at some time and more girls suffer than boys.

## What is the difference between a headache and a migraine?

Migraine is more than just a headache.

If you have migraine you may feel:

- really sick, and might be sick
- extra sensitive to light and noise during an attack
- that you want to lie down and sleep
- that moving about, or exercising, usually makes the headache worse.

## Types of migraine

The most common types of migraine fall into two categories:

- migraine with aura
- migraine without aura.

## What is aura?

You may feel strange before a migraine. You may have problems talking, or see patterns of lights or lines.

These symptoms of an attack are called aura and usually last up to an hour. Aura can be quite scary, especially the first time it happens. However awful migraine makes you feel, things will go back to normal again when the attack is over.

One thing many young people with migraine find is that these feelings can happen even if they don't have a headache and some young people with migraine don't get a head pain at all, they just get the other symptoms.



## Head pain

Migraine can sneak up really quickly. One minute you can be feeling fine, the next you feel like someone is hammering on your head. The pain can last half an hour or several hours, sometime even days. Some don't get the pain in the head but feel sharp pains in the stomach.

## Why does your head hurt?

Most people who have migraines start getting them when they are children. Scientists are still trying to work out exactly why that is. The good news is that some people grow out of their migraines. Another interesting point is that people with migraine often get car sick.

Migraine happens because your brain is extra sensitive to certain changes. We do not know exactly why it is extra sensitive, but it involves the nerves and blood vessels in your head. There may be something about the genes of people who get migraines that makes them likely to have attacks. Genes are instructions that tell your body how to grow and what to do. Your parents pass their genes on to you. That's why, if you get migraines, members of your family may get them too.

## Can I stop it happening?

Some things you do or don't do in your life can 'trigger' a migraine. Triggers are different for everyone. To make things more complicated, often more than one trigger needs to happen to actually cause a migraine. This can make it harder to work out what's behind all of your attacks. So don't worry if it takes a bit of time!

**Keep a diary and write down what's  
in your life every time you**

# Working out your triggers

## Keeping a diary

The best way of remembering what your headaches are like and what may be triggering them is to keep a diary and write down what's happening in your life every time you get an attack. Use your diary to write down things like:

- how you feel
- when and what you ate
- what time you got up
- Changes in your routine
- The date of your period.

You might find that you get fewer attacks once you start to control your triggers. You can use your headache diary to count your attacks, and work out if your plan for managing them is working. Cutting down the number of attacks you have is a good target to aim for. Don't be disappointed if you still get attacks. There are other things you can try to stop these attacks from being as bad.



**happening  
get an attack**

# Common triggers to look out for

## Your routine

You might find that changing your routine sets off a migraine. It's easy to say "don't change your routine", but, when your life is full of school, college, sport, music, friends, homework, projects, parties and family this can seem a difficult task. By sticking to a regular routine you might make your attacks happen less often and won't feel that migraine controls your life. You might notice you get a migraine if you miss lunch one day, or you sleep in late one morning. These are simple things you can spot.

## Eating

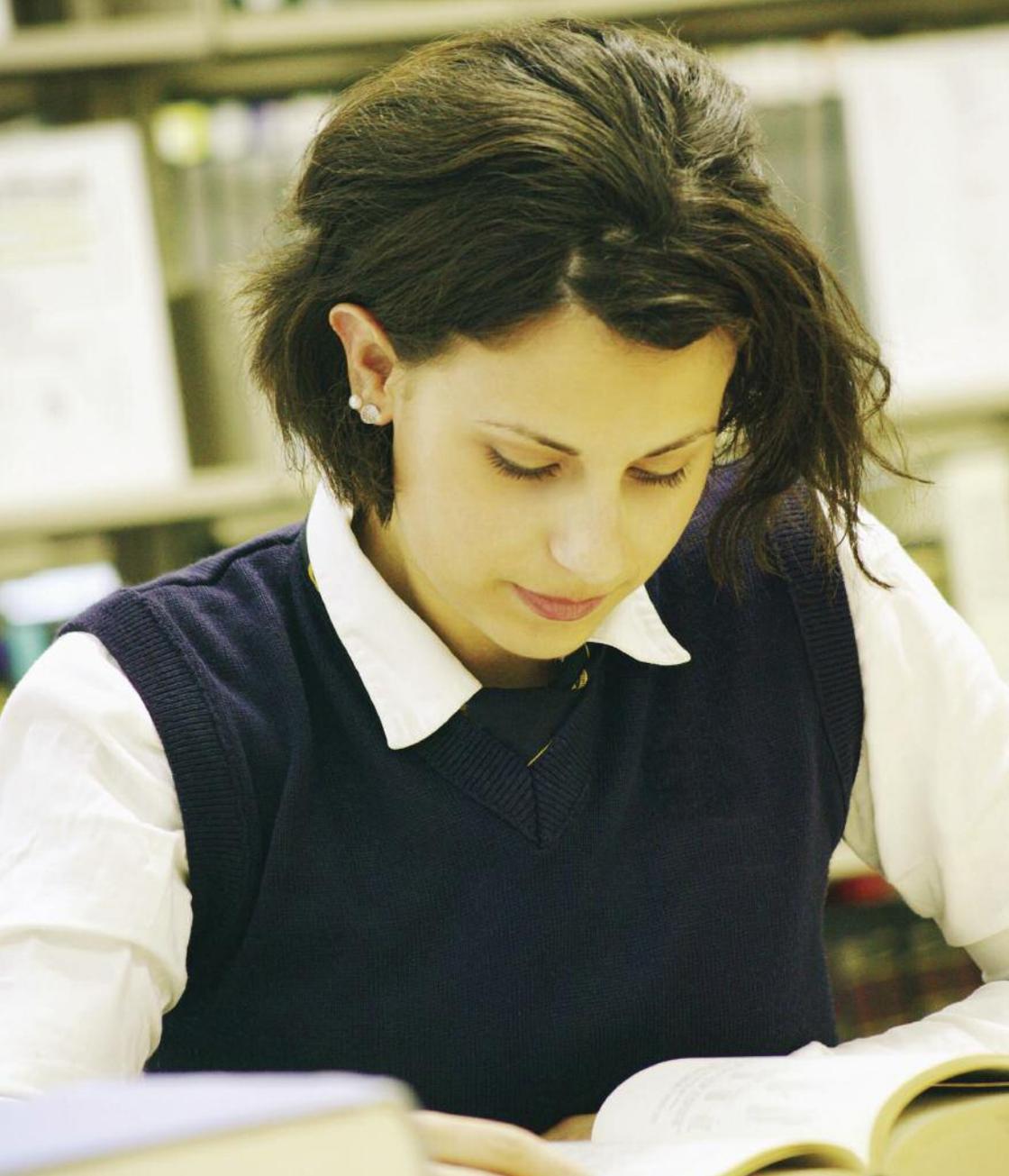
Don't skip meals. Work out when is the best time to eat your breakfast and lunch. Stick to these times even if you're in a rush or don't really feel hungry. If you're with friends, don't let it make you feel different. Stick to your routine and don't be embarrassed by it.

You might think that eating certain foods, like cheese or chocolate, gives you a migraine. This can be hard to spot because sometimes migraine actually makes you want to eat certain foods. It's then easy to blame your migraine on that food. The migraine attack might actually have been starting anyway.

## Drinking

Dehydration is a major cause of headaches and can go on to trigger a migraine. So, make sure you have enough water or soft drinks during the day. You might find it handy to carry a bottle of water with you.





**By making simple changes you may make your attacks happen less often which means you don't feel that migraine controls your life**

## Stress

Being at school or college can cause stress which is a common trigger. Many young students will have headaches during the school/college year, but don't have them during holidays. If you're feeling under pressure or feel stressed:

- don't bottle it up
- talk to a friend, a teacher, a family member or someone you trust
- get organised – plan your days and do the important things first.

## Studying and exams

Remember to plan for time to get some rest and relaxation. If you're planning to do studying after school, make sure you've got breaks in the plan. Listening to music, getting some fresh air, or just getting away from the computer for 15 minutes, can all help. Choose what's best for you.

## Exercise

You might get a migraine after exercising. Getting regular exercise can help your body get used to it so a migraine is less likely to start. Also remember that exercising, if you are hungry or thirsty, is likely to trigger a migraine.

## Hormones

Going through puberty is a really difficult time as your hormones are all over the place. Around 50 per cent of girls with migraine say their menstrual cycle directly affects this. This is a good time to keep a note of your headaches and your period and see if there is a link. If there is, you can be ready for them and take control.

## Computer screens

You need to be aware that the glare and flicker from computer or TV screens can trigger a migraine so don't sit in front of a computer working or playing games without frequent breaks.

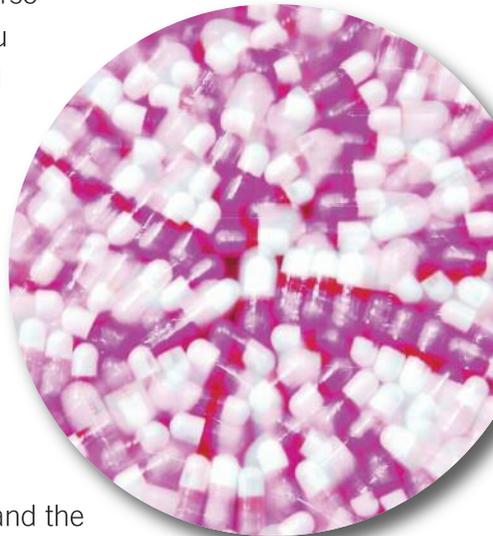
# Older teenagers

## Contraception

If you suffer from migraine and are using, or plan to use, a hormonal method of contraception, (the contraceptive pill, the patch, the vaginal ring, the injection, the implant or the mini-pill) you should discuss this with your GP or family planning nurse. You should never stop using your method suddenly because this could put you at risk of pregnancy.

However, it's very important to tell a doctor or family planning nurse that you get migraines, especially if you are considering using a longterm method of contraception, such as the injection or implant, because these methods can't be reversed quickly. It's good to be aware that:

- Headaches are a common side effect of some hormonal methods of contraception but the headaches will usually improve over time
- Headaches linked to the contraceptive pill might be affected by the dose and type of hormone in that particular pill. Some girls find that their headaches and migraines improve when they start the pill; others notice that their headaches and migraine get worse
- It is important to find the pill that suits you best – there are lots of different types and different hormone combinations
- You should ensure your GP or nurse advisor understands whether you have migraine with or without aura before prescribing the pill or other hormonal methods of contraception as this will determine the best method for you.



## Drugs and alcohol

Be aware of the affect of alcohol, cigarettes and the partying lifestyle. Illegal drugs can lead to a range of health problems. All of these things can make you more vulnerable to an attack particularly if you are tired and dehydrated. Drugs can also cause you to grind your teeth which can then trigger migraine.

## What should I do when I get a migraine?

If you feel a migraine attack coming, the earlier you start trying to stop it the better. Firstly, tell someone about it. If you're at school or college, tell your teacher.

Steps might include simple things like:

- having a drink or eating something
- sitting quietly or lying down
- sleeping, even for just a few minutes can really help
- rest when you start to feel better.

Hopefully, you won't need to go home from school/college, and if you're at home, you can carry on with your day. If your attack doesn't get better, you might need to go home to bed.

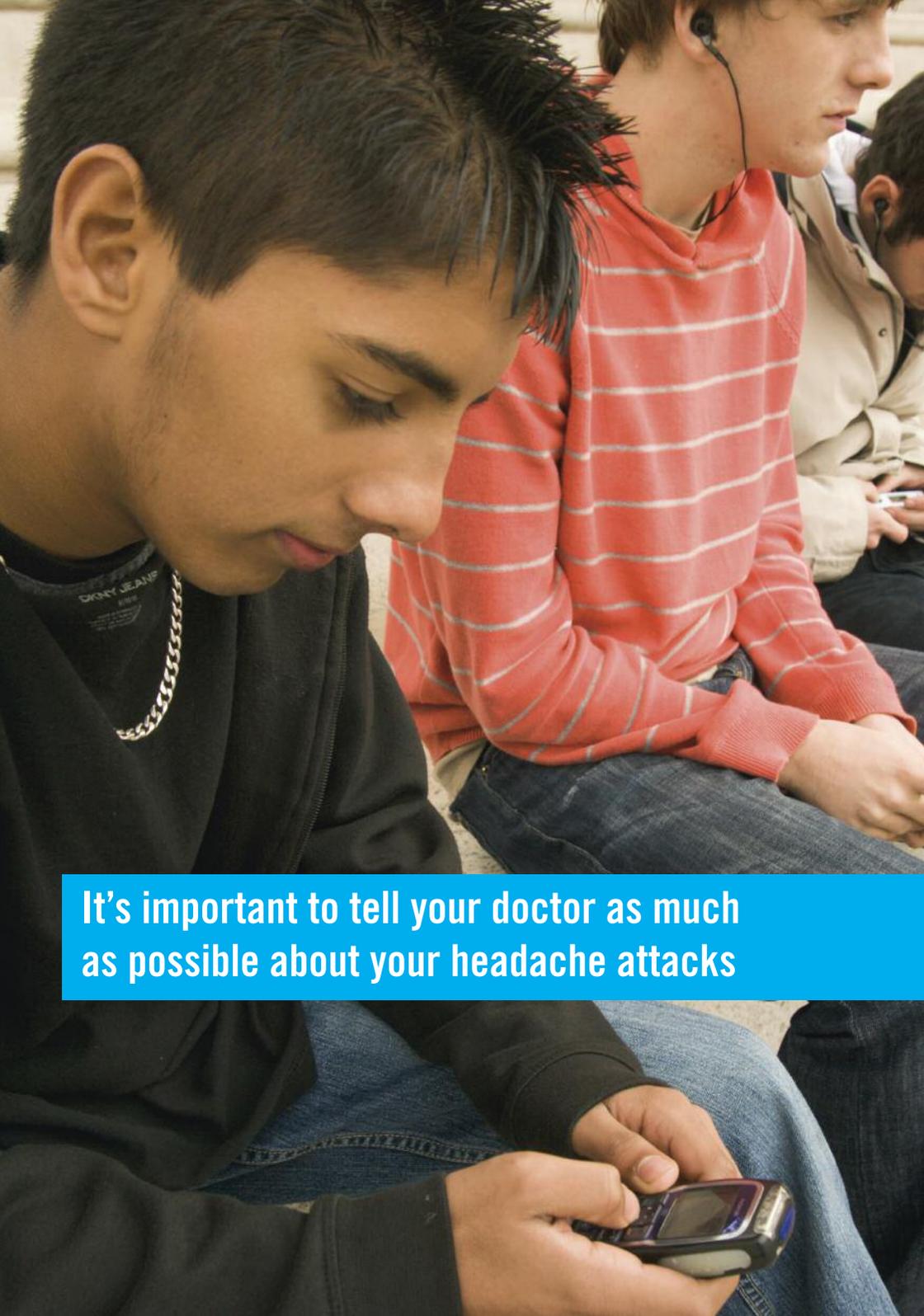
## Seeing your doctor

It's important to talk to your doctor about how you feel. Your doctor can use your headache diary to make the right diagnosis, and to give you advice about things you can do to stop the attacks happening.

It's important to give your doctor as much detail as possible about your symptoms. There is no special test which can tell you if you have migraine. Your doctor will then be able to make a diagnosis of what kind of headaches you are getting and come up with a plan to help you.



**Preventative medicine  
is used to try and stop the  
headaches from happening**



**It's important to tell your doctor as much as possible about your headache attacks**

## Treatments for migraine

Your doctor may also give you medicine to treat your migraine attack. These are usually called acute treatments as they are taken to get rid of the pain when you get the migraine. You might be able to leave a dose of the medicine at school or college, perhaps with your school nurse. The type of medicine you will be given will depend on what your headaches are like. If you often feel very sick, your doctor might give you something to help with this.

## Medication to avoid attacks

If your headaches are having a very bad effect on you, your doctor might suggest you take medication to try and avoid them. This is called preventative medication. It is used to try and stop the headaches from happening.

You will need to take the medicine regularly, even when you are not having headaches. Keeping a migraine diary will help you to work out if the medication is helping to cut down the number of attacks.

## Managing medicines and medical conditions in schools

It may be necessary for your GP to send a letter to the school informing them of the support you may need when you have a migraine.

If your migraine is becoming so bad it is stopping you studying and keeping you off school you should ask your parent or carer to speak to the school about it. Your school or college should have guidelines about how to support you and your condition – see [www.medicalconditionsatschool.org.uk](http://www.medicalconditionsatschool.org.uk)



## Feeling different

Sometimes your headaches might make you feel different from your friends. If you have to leave the class because of your headaches, or can't meet your friends when you had arranged to, tell them why. Tell them that it's difficult to guess when a migraine is going to come on. Say that you have to stop and rest for a while, but apart from that your life is the same. With a bit of explaining, your friends might understand your headaches better, and you'll feel better too.

## When to worry about a headache

The way migraine headaches repeat themselves makes them identifiable, However, in some cases the headache may be caused by a more serious condition. There are a number of important warnings that may suggest a headache is connected to a serious illness and should be reported to a doctor immediately:

- Chronic headache (where the pain is constant, and may get worse and worse) may show the condition has a more serious cause
- A sudden, severe headache that happens without the other recognised migraine symptoms may be cause for concern
- Excessive vomiting, changes in your vision, balance problems, weakness or lack of co-ordination should also be discussed with a doctor
- A headache that is accompanied by spots on parts of your body.

## The Migraine Trust

You can find out more about migraine by calling The Migraine Trust on **020 7462 6610**, emailing **info@migrainetrust.org** or visiting our website **www.migrainetrust.org**

## Ten top tips for managing migraine

- 1 Make sure you know the difference between a headache and a migraine
- 2 See your doctor and get a diagnosis
- 3 Try to work out what triggers your migraine
- 4 Try to keep a migraine diary for three months
- 5 Remember to drink plenty of water and eat regularly
- 6 Avoid sugary snacks and fizzy drinks
- 7 Get organised – particularly around exam time to try and reduce your stress
- 8 Take regular exercise – aim for three times a week
- 9 Tell your school or college about your migraine
- 10 Make sure you understand what medication you are taking and what works best for you



**You can find out more about migraine by calling  
020 7462 6610, emailing [info@migrainetrust.org](mailto:info@migrainetrust.org)  
or visiting our website [www.migrainetrust.org](http://www.migrainetrust.org)**

## Also available:

- Migraine advice for 7 to 12 year olds
- Migraine advice for parents and carers, and those who supervise children and teens such as teachers

© The Migraine Trust 2009

We hope you find the information in this booklet helpful, but it is not a substitute for the advice a doctor or pharmacist may give you, based on their expert knowledge of your history, condition and treatment.

the  
**migraine**  
trust

55-56 Russell Square  
London WC1B 4HP

Tel: 020 7462 6601

Fax: 020 7436 2880

Email: [info@migrainetrust.org](mailto:info@migrainetrust.org)

[www.migrainetrust.org](http://www.migrainetrust.org)

Registered Charity No. 1081300

