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Migraine

An estimated 4-5% of school-age children suffer from migraines, and some studies put this number even higher - at around 10%. About 1 in 5 adult migraine sufferers say their migraines started before the age of 10. At this age, both males and females have equal prevalence, although the onset - or age of first migraine - may be earlier in boys.

Migraine in a child can be difficult to diagnose. The child may not complain of a headache, but rather other associated symptoms, such as abdominal pain or vomiting, sleepiness, vertigo, and sensitivity to light and noise. In childhood migraine, unlike adult migraine, the headache is often on both sides of the head. Also, while adults can usually tell that a migraine is about to begin (by seeing flashing lights, spots or some other "aura"), children usually have no warning. Some kids who do experience an aura before their migraine headaches may complain of visual distortions where objects or people appear larger or smaller than they really are. These types of visual changes are given the literary name "Alice in Wonderland" syndrome.

Factors associated with childhood migraines include family history of migraine, allergies, tension at home or school, playing on the computer or video games, loud noises and hot climates.

The good news is that not all childhood migraine sufferers will become adult sufferers. A 40-year study of children with migraine showed that by the age of 30, the majority were migraine free.

The Teenage Years

With the onset of puberty, migraines become more frequent, especially in girls, who have them three times as often as boys. Why do the incidence and prevalence of migraine increase so dramatically at this stage of life? The age and gender-specificity suggest that the onset of menstruation and the female hormones involved may play an important role in migraine. Furthermore, the emotional turmoil accompanying the teenage years combined with academic stress may trigger migraine in both boys and girls.

Migraine Triggers

Sleep deprivation and poor sleep habits can lead to headaches, especially migraine attacks. Though hypoglycemia is a rare cause of headaches, eating three meals at regular intervals is important in helping control migraines. The stress of school or changes at home may precipitate headaches in many children.

Foods can trigger migraine as well, including:

- * Ripened cheeses such as cheddar, Gruyere, Stilton, Brie and Camembert
- * Chocolate
- * Caffeine
 - Vinegar (except white vinegar)
 - Sour cream, yogurt
 - Nuts, peanut butter
 - Prepared baked goods (donuts, coffee cakes)
 - Lima beans, navy beans, pea pods
 - MSG (monosodium glutamate)
 - Bananas
 - Pizza
 - Pork
 - Sausages, bologna, pepperoni, hot dogs
 - Food dyes

* These are notorious migraine triggers

Odors: Perfume, gasoline, various food odors

Prolonged computer or video game usage are frequent triggers!

Treatment

The first step in treatment is to avoid known triggers, such as cheeses and chocolate. Good sleep habits (going to bed at a consistent time and arising at about the same time each day) may alleviate some headaches. Keeping computer and video game time to a minimum is also a good step.

As far as medication, headaches can usually be managed with over the counter drugs, such as tylenol or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Prescription medications are used in more severe cases of migraine. If headaches are frequent and disabling, medications to prevent headache occurrences may need to be considered.

When migraine headaches are disabling, we may ask you to see the "headache specialist" - a child neurologist.



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