



MIGRAINE - A TEACHER'S GUIDE UNDERSTANDING MIGRAINE IN THE CLASSROOM

What is Migraine?

Migraine is an often misunderstood and under-diagnosed neurological condition affecting approximately 10% of all Irish children.

Symptoms

- Intense throbbing headache usually on one side of the head, worsened by movement or routine physical activity
- Episodic attacks – headaches are not constantly present
- Attacks can last from 4-72 hours, usually less than 24 hours in children
- Nausea, sometimes vomiting. Stomach-ache is a common feature in younger children

- Sensitivity to bright light, loud noise and strong smells
- Other symptoms can include: stiffness of the neck and shoulders, blurred vision and extreme sensitivity around the scalp
- Not all of these symptoms need to be present and none of them are absolutely required for a diagnosis of migraine.



Why take headaches and Migraine seriously in children?

- The child's school performance may decline
- Headaches can be debilitating, affecting the child's ability to participate in activities and social events
- Relationships with friends and other family members can be affected
- Migraine may be indicative of other trouble in the child's life such as lack of sleep, poor diet, stress, depression, or other illness
- Learning to control the condition from an early age can minimise the cost and disability involved.

Migraine in young people



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Young people can present with a group of symptoms that do not include a headache at all. Symptoms such as stomachache, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting may be the major part of a child's attack, making it harder to recognise in children. This is known as *Abdominal Migraine* evolving into more typical migraine after puberty. The abdominal pain can be dull, sore or intense and is usually located around the middle of the abdomen in the navel area.

Migraine and school work



Throughout their school-life and especially at exam time, migraine can interfere with a student's work. Children with migraine can employ a number of measures to ensure that their migraine is not triggered by events at school, e.g.

- Regular breaks during study periods especially if using computers
- Eat regularly throughout the day. If certain foodstuffs are a trigger factor, bring a "trigger-free lunch" to school
- Control stress levels, e.g. leisure activities, time management, relaxation techniques
- Regular fresh air and exercise, e.g. walk or cycle to school
- Maintain a comfortable and ergonomic study environment
- Students with migraine should be moved away from bright sunlight or light that reflects from the board
- Be prepared for an attack in school, e.g. if the student uses acute medications, they should have it to hand or leave it with the school nurse.

Migraine Questions & Answers



Can you tell if a child is going to get a Migraine?

Prior to the headache, children may experience a Prodrome. You may notice the student becoming paler, quieter than usual or more irritable. Food cravings, tiredness and yawning are other common symptoms of the Prodrome.



What medical treatments are available?

The only medications suitable for children are Paracetamol and Ibuprofen in recommended doses. Anti-nausea medication can also be taken by children under supervision. Aspirin is not suitable and

neither are the migraine-specific triptan medications. If a child has very severe or frequent migraine, their GP may prescribe daily preventive medication.

What should I do when a student gets a Migraine attack?

- If the school has a nurse, they should be contacted
- Ideally the student should be removed to a quiet dark room. This environment can reduce the severity of an attack or even abort it altogether



- If the student carries acute medication for their attacks, it should be taken as early into the attack as possible
- Self-help measures such as a short sleep or applying a cold pack can also help and may get the student back to the classroom promptly
- If necessary, the parents or guardian should be contacted and this is strongly recommended if it is the first time the student has experienced particular symptoms
- If these measures are not having an impact, consider sending the student home
- In an emergency situation or if the parents /guardian are uncontactable, a GP can be called

Reasonable Accommodations During State Exams

In extreme circumstances, if a student suffers with migraine, special arrangements can be made to facilitate candidates taking state examinations. The school needs a letter from the student's GP/Consultant before approaching the State Examinations Commission.

The arrangements that can be made, depending on the individual circumstances, include:

- Allowing a student to sit the exam on their own with their own superintendent
- Providing a tape recorder to record the answers if the candidate cannot write due to an attack
- Allowing a delayed examination start time. The start of the examination may be delayed provided the candidate has not had contact with other candidates or any person who may have had sight of the question paper or have knowledge of the question paper contents. Where the start of the examination is delayed, the candidate may be allowed the full time specified for the examination. Candidates may not, however, take an examination on a later date under any circumstances.

Without recourse to the State Examinations Commission, the school may authorise breaks or rest periods in each examination session that are warranted by the physical or medical condition of the candidate.

Under this type of accommodation the

time taken for rest or as a break may be compensated for at the close of each examination period to a maximum of 20 minutes.



For further information contact Reasonable Accommodations Section, State Examinations Commission, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co Westmeath.

Web: www.examinations.ie

Email: sec_specialneeds@education.gov.ie

Phone: 090-6442781

Migraine Association of Ireland

CALL-SAVE HELPLINE
1850 200 378

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Advice Line: 01 797 9848

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Monday – Thursday)

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