



5 Tips for Explaining Migraines to Family and Friends

1 Explain that a migraine is different from a regular headache.

The first thing your loved ones need to know is that a migraine is not “just a headache.” The pain can be intense, and you can have different types of pain, such as stabbing or throbbing sensations. You can have pain on one or both sides of your head, and it often gets worse when you move (which is one reason migraines can interrupt work and other activities).



A headache is usually just that: pain in your head. Migraines cause many other symptoms, such as sensitivity to light/sounds/smells, nausea, vomiting, vision problems, and difficulty thinking or finding words. A migraine can last between 4 hours and 3 days. Many people feel sick and have a headache even after the migraine itself ends.

Nonprescription medications such as aspirin or acetaminophen usually help a headache. These medications help some people with migraines, but not everyone. And even though there are more migraine medications than there were in the past, they don't work for everyone. Even prescription medication does not help everyone.

A migraine can last between 4 hours and 3 days

2 Help them understand that migraines are physical, not mental.

A common myth is that migraine is a mental or emotional condition. Today, scientists know that changes in the brain cause migraines, and these changes are probably genetic. In other words, if your mother had migraines, you might have them, too.

The good news is that making positive lifestyle changes such as lowering stress and exercising, eating, and sleeping on a regular schedule can help prevent migraines. So although migraines start in your physical brain, taking care of your mental and emotional well-being can help stop them.



3 Tell them how migraines affect your life.

You might try to hide the effects of migraines from friends and family, but telling them how migraines affect you can help them understand this condition.

Write down the main ways migraines affect your life on the lines below. Then use these notes to explain to loved ones how migraines affect you.

How migraines affect my life:

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

4 Explain what you can and cannot do during a migraine.

During a migraine, you probably need to limit your activities. Some people cannot do anything but lie quietly in a dark room. Others might be able to watch a quiet movie with family members.



Write down what you can and cannot do during a migraine. Every migraine is unique, so you might be able to do different things at different times. But think about what you usually can or cannot do. Then you can show this to your loved ones or talk with them about your limits.

Some people cannot do anything but lie quietly in a dark room

During a migraine, I usually cannot:

During a migraine, I usually can:

5 Consider writing your friends and family a letter.

Author Teri Robert writes about migraines to help educate patients and families. She wrote a letter for family and friends of people with migraines so they can learn more about this condition (www.helpforheadaches.com/lwfiles/Family_Migraine_Letter.pdf). You can print this letter and give it to loved ones, use it to help explain your migraines, or write your own letter.



Developed by Med-IQ in collaboration with the National Headache Foundation.