

# Seeking Medical Help for Your Migraine

For many living with migraine, a headache specialist makes all the difference. From diagnosing your particular type of migraine to designing a treatment plan that works for you, a headache specialist is a capable ally and can be a vital addition to your migraine support team. Learn more about what a headache specialist is, whether you should make an appointment to see one, and how to find one.

## 6 Signs It's Time to See a Headache Specialist

*Not every patient needs to see a headache specialist. You should seek specialized care if:*

- 1. Your diagnosis is not clear.** Visit a headache specialist if you think you've been misdiagnosed or your symptoms have changed. Getting the right diagnosis is the first step to creating a migraine management plan that works for you.
- 2. Your headache becomes more frequent.** Keep a headache journal to record the frequency of your migraine attacks. If you notice that they are occurring more frequently, or suspect that you are experiencing chronic migraine, it's time to see a headache specialist.
- 3. Your treatments aren't working.** It's frustrating to invest time and energy into treatments that don't show results. If you feel like you've exhausted your options, consult a specialist to talk about your treatment history and find a new plan together.
- 4. You have a complicated medical history.** Every patient's medical history is different, but a sudden onset of headache in someone who isn't headache prone is reason to seek out a specialist's opinion.
- 5. You exhibit unusual symptoms.** If you get physically weak or numb during a migraine attack, have trouble speaking or experience unusual symptoms like prolonged auras or prolonged pain (more than three days), it's time to see a specialist.
- 6. You have medical problems that may occur with migraine.** People with conditions that exist simultaneously with migraine, such as fibromyalgia or depression, should see a headache specialist to find a comprehensive treatment plan that addresses all of their symptoms.

**Tip:** *If you're hesitant to see a headache specialist, talk to your primary care provider. He or she can help you talk through your options and provide a referral if you need further help.*



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## *Which Physician Should You See?*

### **Primary Care Doctor**

Your primary care provider is the best person to refer you to a neurologist or headache specialist for diagnosis and treatment. Contact your primary care provider if you are experiencing frequent and intense migraine and headache symptoms. They can either help you get treatment or set you on the right track for getting the treatment you deserve.

### **Headache Specialist**

A headache specialist is a physician who is experienced in the diagnosis and treatment of migraine and severe head pain. He or she has taken an active interest in the field of headache medicine and helping patients who are living with a headache disorder. Headache specialists can be certified by the United Council for Neurologic Subspecialties (UCNS), but the designation is relatively new and not all headache specialists are certified, nor is it a requirement.

### **Neurologist**

Neurologists are not necessarily headache specialists. They may be able to diagnosis and treat a patient with migraine or a headache disorder, but they may not be up to date on the latest research developments and treatments unless they take specialist interest in the field of headache medicine.



### **How to Make an Appointment With a Headache Specialist**

1. Talk to your primary care provider.
2. Use the American Migraine Foundation's doctor finder.
3. Don't be discouraged by long wait times.
4. Prepare for your visit.

### **What to Bring to Your Visit**

- ✓ Objectives for your first meeting
- ✓ Your headache journal
- ✓ Notes about your medical history, including surgical procedures, hospitalizations and family history
- ✓ Imaging from previous scans or studies
- ✓ A list of medicines you've taken and dosages (can be obtained from your pharmacy)
- ✓ Questions for your headache specialist

Visit [americanmigrainefoundation.org](http://americanmigrainefoundation.org) to learn more about different types of migraine, common triggers and more to prepare for your visit.

#### **American Migraine Foundation**

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