

Managing MIGRAINE at Work

Tips For Managing Migraine at Work

If your migraine attacks interfere with work, you're not alone. In fact, Americans miss about 113 million days of work each year because of migraine. The good news is there are steps you can take to manage your migraine attacks when you're at work.

What's Triggering Your Migraine Attacks?

Many people who have migraine disease are able to reduce the number of attacks by avoiding things that trigger, or set off, their headaches.

A number of things can trigger migraine attacks. Some of the most common include:

- not drinking enough fluids
- food
- caffeine and alcohol
- hormones that change with the menstrual cycle
- odors
- lights

If you've kept a migraine diary, you may know what triggers your attacks. If not, the Association of Migraine Disorders (AMD) offers an easy to use [diary](#) that will help you learn about your triggers. Also, a number of free or low-cost apps are available for you to track migraines and triggers on your smartphone.

Most people have multiple migraine triggers.



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Environment: What You Can Do

Making minor changes to your environment or work habits can help control attacks.

Reduce Exposure to Odors

- If odors from copiers and printers are a trigger, make sure you're not seated near them and ask others to do these tasks.
- Explain to colleagues who wear scents that they can trigger your migraine attacks and ask that they skip wearing them. If that's not comfortable, avoid being seated near them.

Adjust Light Sources

- If you spend long periods of time at a computer, an anti-glare screen protector or tinted therapeutic glasses can reduce the intensity of light from the screen.
- Some people find it helps to adjust the brightness settings and background colors on their computers. Free software can be installed on your computer that mimics natural light and reduces blue light, which has been shown to increase migraine pain.
- Fluorescent light is a notorious trigger, especially if there is a pulse or flicker. At work, you can ask to be seated where there are no fluorescent lights or ask to have the one over your work area unscrewed. Another option is to cover overhead fluorescent fixtures with a special film that reduces their brightness.

Turn Down the Volume

- Ask if you can work in a low-traffic area where it's not very noisy.
- Wear sound-canceling headphones or use a sound machine with soothing nature sounds.

Working and Activity

- Maintain good posture to reduce stress on the muscles of your neck and shoulders. Avoid hunching your shoulders or craning your neck forward. If you're at a computer, the screen should be directly in front of you, with the top of the screen at eye level.
- Change your position regularly. Stand up and walk around or stretch.

What You Eat and Drink

- Stay hydrated by drinking water frequently.
- Don't skip meals and maintain a regular eating schedule.
- Avoid caffeine and salty foods

When You Have a Migraine Attack

- Make sure you have migraine medications at work. By taking them when you first notice symptoms, you may be able to stop the headache or reduce the symptoms.
- If possible, spend time in a quiet room, such as an unused conference room or a storage room.

Medications Can Help Prevent Migraine

If you have more than four migraine attacks each month or your attacks are severe, talk with your doctor about taking a medication to prevent them.



A Word About Stigma

Not everyone at work understands that migraine attacks are more severe and have more associated symptoms than other headaches. Talking with coworkers about your migraine disease can help them know what you experience and how they can help.

Your Employer's Role

If you have to take a lot of time off, or your work performance is affected by your attacks, it may be time to speak with your manager and/or your human resources department. Explain your symptoms and talk about accommodations that can reduce your exposure to triggers at work. You also may want to arrange to take time off, if needed, when you have a migraine. Be sure to make it clear that you will make up missed work.

Increasingly, employers are recognizing that making minor accommodations for employees with migraine disease can help reduce work absences and loss of productivity. The minor steps they take can help them retain valued employees.

Migraine Disability Assessment Questionnaire (MIDAS)

There are a number of tests you can take to help you understand how migraine affects your ability to function at work and home. One of the most used is the **Migraine Disability Assessment Questionnaire (MIDAS)**. This is a quick test that you can take at home.

You can download a copy of the [MIDAS Questionnaire here](#).

