

Managing Migraine at work

Information to support you in managing your migraine at work



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The Migraine Trust offers free information and support for everyone affected by migraine. Contact our Helpline on 0808 802 0066 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm) or through our contact form and Live Chat service at migrainetrust.org/support. You can also email us at info@migrainetrust.org

About this toolkit



Migraine can have a huge impact on working life. We know from our own research that around half of people with migraine say it has a negative impact on their ability to work. This impact can be significantly reduced when people are well supported at work, but unfortunately this doesn't always happen in practice.

We're here to help, with a whole host of information to support you in managing your migraine at work. We also hope it will help you feel empowered and better prepared for conversations with your manager or employer about your migraine.

You can work through this toolkit at your own pace. Read the sections that feel relevant to you and come back to others when you need them. We have further resources on our website that can help you identify changes you can make, and support discussions with your manager or employer.

Around half of people say their migraine has a negative impact on their ability to work.¹

Over a third of employees have felt discriminated against at work due to their migraine.²

Over half of employees say their workplace has not made reasonable adjustments to support them.²

1. The Migraine Trust survey in 2,028 people living with migraine, September 2024

2. The Migraine Trust survey in over 1,000 people living with migraine, July 2023

Migraine and work

why it matters

How migraine can affect your work

If you have ever experienced a migraine attack at work, you'll know just how difficult it can be. Symptoms like head pain, feeling or being sick and sensitivity to lights or sounds can make it impossible to work effectively. And if your migraine attacks are severe, you may feel like you're unable to work at all.

Symptoms can continue for days, or even longer for some people. And this can mean long periods off work or where you're not able to perform your job properly. Side effects from migraine medication such as drowsiness may affect your ability to work effectively too.

Everyone's experience of migraine is very different. It might be that your migraine attacks are mild or infrequent – perhaps just once or twice a year. But you may still be living with the worry of a migraine attack suddenly happening during an important work event. Migraine symptoms and their impact on your work may also change over time.

If you have chronic migraine, with very frequent migraine attacks, you may be finding it difficult to work at all or to remain in your role.

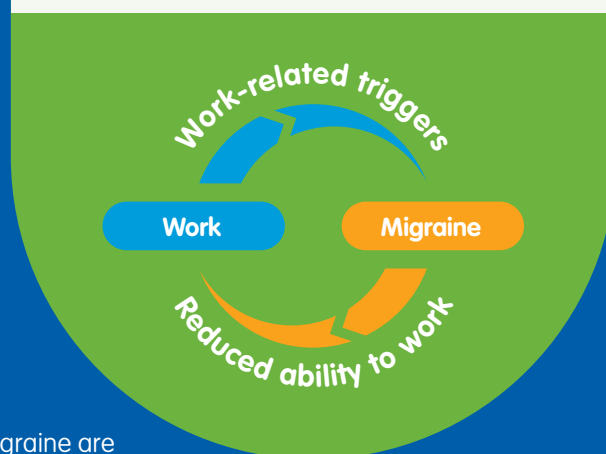
How your workplace can affect your migraine

Just as migraine can disrupt your work life, your work may have a negative effect on your migraine too. Whether you are working on a screen or on your feet all day, there may be factors about your workplace that make a migraine attack more likely.

Common work-related triggers for migraine can include:

- lighting, noise and smells in the workplace
- stress
- screen use
- working long hours and lack of regular breaks
- changes in routine for shift workers.

If you don't have support from managers or colleagues, you may feel like it's harder to cope when you do have a migraine attack during work time.



The good news...

The good news is that with a supportive employer and some adjustments where necessary, the majority of people with migraine are better able to manage their migraine in the workplace. We know that being in work is usually a good thing for mental health and general wellbeing. And if you're feeling better in yourself, you may feel far more able to cope with the effects of living with migraine.

Finding ways to manage your migraine in the workplace can make a huge difference to your overall quality of life.

Telling people at work about your migraine

It's your choice whether to tell your manager or employer about your migraine. It can feel daunting, especially as there is often misunderstanding and stigma about the condition. But letting them know how migraine affects you may mean they are better able to support you.

It's important that your manager understands if your migraine is seriously impacting on your work. They may have certain legal obligations if your migraine is severe enough to be considered a disability. See page 11 for further information on this.

Even if you don't get migraine attacks very often or they don't usually interfere with your work, it can still be worthwhile talking to your manager. Migraine symptoms often change over time, so it can be helpful for your manager to know you have migraine. And it may still be worth thinking about potential triggers in your workplace, and how to reduce these.

You might want to talk to a manager or employer:

- when you are starting a new role, so they are aware of your migraine from the very beginning of your employment
- during your employment if the severity or frequency of migraine attacks have changed
- if your role or work environment has changed, and it's affecting your migraine
- during a return-to-work meeting if you have been off work.

You may consider talking to colleagues or team members about your migraine too. We know people often think of migraine as 'just a headache'. Taking time to explain your symptoms and the impact it has on your work may help them to understand and support you.

It's your choice who you tell. You are under no obligation to share your medical information with others at work.



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“I think it's very important for managers to know that migraine is not just a headache. There is unfortunately a lot of stigma attached to it.”

Misba

We have different resources that can help with talking to people at work about migraine, including our workplace checklist and factsheet. You can download them from our website at migrainetrust.org/resources

Tips for preventing migraine attacks at work

There are lots of things you can do that may help to reduce your risk of getting migraine attacks at work. And if you do have a migraine attack, some of these measures may help you to cope better.

Your employer may be able to help put some of these in place as 'reasonable adjustments' to support you. See page 13 to find out more. Others may be things you can do yourself.

Keeping well

Things you can try to do outside of work, that may help in work.

- Reviewing your medication regularly with your doctor and making sure you take it as advised.
- Using a migraine diary to keep track of possible triggers.
- Setting a good sleep routine. If you work night shifts, use blackout curtains, eye masks and earplugs to keep your sleep environment as quiet and dark as possible.
- Finding ways to relax and reduce stress. Relaxation techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and yoga may also help with sleep.
- Maintaining healthy habits – eating well with regular mealtimes, keeping hydrated and staying active.

Changes in your workspace

Changes you may be able to make yourself or with support from your employer.

- Making sure you are not situated near flickering lights, or that any lighting issues are fixed quickly.
- Positioning yourself near natural light using blinds as necessary to reduce window glare. Desk lamps can often be better than overhead lighting.
- If you use a computer, using anti-glare screens and blue light filters, and making sure you have regular breaks from the screen.
- If you are desk-based, making sure your desk, screen and chair are at the right height to allow good posture and prevent neck or back pain.
- Wearing tinted glasses or safety glasses if you work outside or are affected by lighting in your workplace.
- Keeping your workplace well-ventilated and a comfortable temperature.
- Using earplugs or ear defenders if noise is an issue.
- Making time for regular breaks so you can move around and keep to mealtimes.
- Keeping hydrated – especially if you have a physical job.
- Keeping to a regular routine if you work from home.

Adjustments to work practices and procedures

Changes to discuss putting in place with your employer or manager.

- Making sure you have clear objectives, adequate support and achievable workload to prevent stress.
- Considering changes in working hours, flexible or remote working if this would help with time management, stress or workplace triggers.
- Rotating tasks or having regular breaks from tasks that may trigger migraine attacks.
- Limiting online meetings or considering alternative ways to connect if video calls are an issue for you.
- Avoiding unnecessary meetings and travel that may disrupt your usual routine.
- Avoiding unplanned overtime or shift work.
- Allowing time off for medical appointments.

Here are some examples of positive changes people have made to help with migraine at work.



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“One of the major issues that I had working in a large laboratory was the bright fluorescent lighting; I overcame this by wearing migraine glasses. The laboratory can also be extremely noisy – I wear earplugs which help to drown out the background noise.”

Misba



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“Screens often make my migraine attacks worse or can trigger a migraine attack. When I worked at the call centre, they made sure that all of the blue screen filters were on my screen so it could be as kind on my eyes as possible.”

Amelia

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“Cleaning products used in the office used to trigger really bad migraine attacks – I used to be physically sick at work. I requested to work two days a week from home so I’m taken away from those smells and that helped massively.”

Sandip



Use our **Managing your migraine at work checklist** to note down changes that would help you. Download it from our website at migrainetrust.org/resources



Coping with migraine attacks at work

Despite anyone's best efforts, migraine attacks can't always be avoided. But what can you do if you feel a migraine attack starting when you're working? It's useful to plan in advance just for this situation.

Don't forget that migraine attacks are very different for everyone. Some people may feel able to carry on working after having a rest and taking medication. Others may be OK if they're able to switch tasks. But for some people, symptoms may be so debilitating that it's impossible to work.

Some things to think about may include:

- what tasks you can or can't manage during a migraine attack
- if there is somewhere quiet you can rest and take your medication when symptoms start
- if there is someone who can provide immediate cover if necessary (depending on your job requirements)
- how quickly you may need to go home when a migraine attack starts, and how you would get home safely
- what the risks are if you are in a job role where having migraine symptoms could cause more significant problems – such as operating machinery, driving, caring for people or being responsible for children.

Talk through these points with your manager and use our **Managing your migraine at work checklist** to put some plans in place.

Emergency migraine kit

Think about putting together an 'emergency migraine kit' to keep with you at work. This can include all the things that you find useful during a migraine attack.



Amelia describes her experience of managing migraine attacks while working in a shop:

"They wouldn't put me at the tills – I would do something else instead for a few hours until I was feeling a little bit better. That way I didn't have to leave work just because I had a migraine attack the night before."

Taking time off work for migraine

When to take time off?

Working when you have a migraine attack may just not be possible. Whether you need to take time off will be very individual to you. It will depend on the type of symptoms you have and how severe they are, as well as the type of work you do. However, you should never feel pressured to carry on working if you are struggling with head pain or other symptoms. This can lead to 'presenteeism'.

This is just as important if you work from home. You may feel you can 'push through' a migraine attack if you're working from home. But it's better to take the time off if you need to.

Don't forget, you may also need to take time off as you recover from a migraine attack. This is called the 'postdrome' stage and can take days for some people.

It's worthwhile talking through exactly how migraine affects you with your manager. If you do need time off due to a migraine attack, knowing your manager understands is one less thing to worry about.

You should also make sure you are familiar with your company's procedures on sickness absence and sick pay. Speak to your manager or Human Resources (HR) department or representative if you're unsure.

How much time off can I have?

You may be worried about how much time you need to take off due to migraine, especially if this builds up over time. There is no legal upper limit to the amount of sick leave you can take. But companies often have their own policies on this. There might be a set limit for when absences will automatically trigger a review.

This means the organisation may look into the reasons why someone has gone over a certain amount of sick leave. A review could lead to dismissal if an individual reaches a certain amount of sick leave. However, when migraine is classed as a disability under law, employers must make sure they have considered any reasonable adjustments before reaching this stage. This might include discounting a certain amount of sickness absence related to migraine, or extending the limit for when absences might trigger a review. They should also request an occupational health assessment to assess your needs before deciding how to proceed.

We have more information about your legal rights around dismissal in our section 'Is my job at risk due to migraine?' on page 14.

What is presenteeism?

Presenteeism is when you continue to work, despite being unwell. Although you may be present at work, you might not be able to do your job effectively. It can delay you feeling better and may contribute to 'burnout' at work.



"It really hurt me to know my colleagues were aware I had migraine but still thought I was just faking it so I could get a week off. People often don't understand migraine and the effect it can have on your mental and physical wellbeing."

Conner

What about sick pay?

You may be entitled to sick pay if you have to take sickness absence because of your migraine. This will be the case whether or not your migraine is classed as a disability.

Your employer may offer:

- statutory sick pay (SSP) – this is the minimum amount employers must pay by law when workers meet certain criteria (£118.75 per week from 6 April 2025)
- contractual sick pay – an amount greater than SSP, specified in your company's own policy.

Check your employment contract or talk to your manager or HR department to find out about your employer's sick pay policy.

More about SSP

SSP is currently only paid after you have been off sick for at least four days in a row (including non-working days). The first three days are not paid. It's also only paid if you earn above a certain amount (£125 a week from 6 April 2025).

However, planned changes to SSP announced in March 2025 include:

- being entitled to SSP from the first day of illness, rather than the fourth
- removing the lower earnings limit – instead, people who earn less than SSP will receive 80% of their weekly earnings.

These changes will take some time to come in. Check the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) and Acas websites for the latest information on sick pay. We include details of these organisations at the end of the toolkit.

What if I'm self-employed and can't work?

If you are self-employed, you won't be eligible for statutory sick pay. But there may be other benefits you can claim if you can't work due to your migraine. These include the following.

- Employment and Support Allowance. You can apply for this if you have a disability or health condition that affects how much you work. You must have paid enough National Insurance contributions to be eligible.
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This can help with extra living costs if you have a long-term health condition or disability and have difficulty doing everyday tasks or getting around.
- Access to Work. You may be eligible for a grant to help pay for practical support with work.
- Universal Credit. You may be able to get this if you are on low income or need help with living costs.

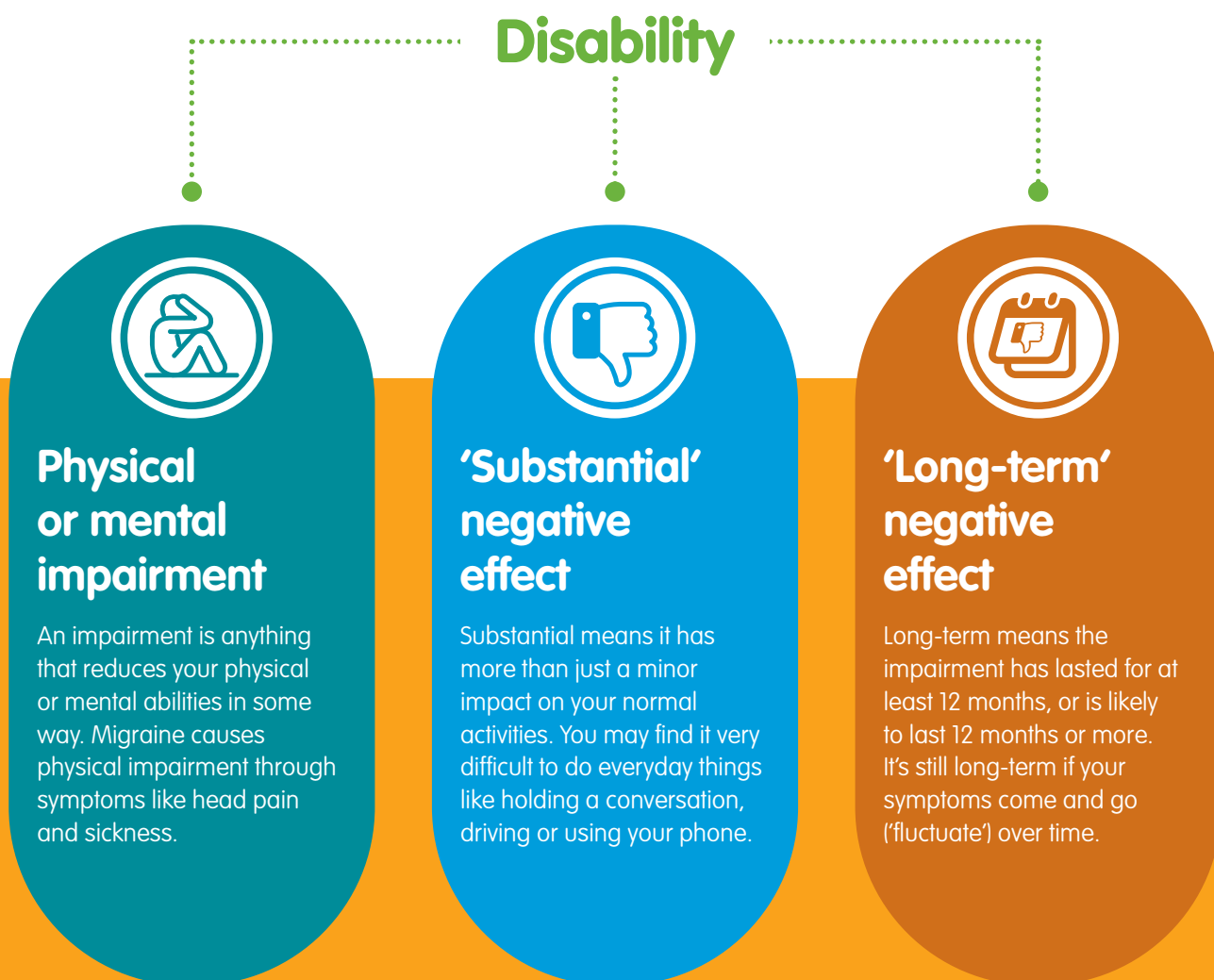
You can find out more about these benefits on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk), or on our [website](#).

Your legal rights

Is migraine a disability?

You might not think having migraine could mean you have a disability. But many different types of health condition can be classed as a disability – even invisible ones, like migraine. When a health condition is legally defined as a disability it means you are protected from discrimination under law.

So when is migraine considered as a disability? The UK laws relating to disability in the workplace are the Equality Act 2010 in England, Scotland and Wales and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland. These laws define disability as having a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal day-to-day activities. What does this mean exactly?



How do I know?

Whether or not your migraine can be considered a disability will usually depend on how often you have migraine attacks and how severe they are. If you experience occasional, mild attacks, it is less likely to be classed as a disability than in someone who has frequent, severe attacks. If migraine is significantly impacting your work over a long period of time, chances are it fulfils the criteria to be considered a disability.

The law also says to discount any medication or treatment that you're taking. This means even if your migraine is currently well controlled with treatment, it may still count as a disability. This is because if you stopped treatment, your migraine could cause a substantial, long-term negative effect.

Declaring disability

It's up to you if or when you tell an employer you have a health condition that may be considered a disability. You don't need to show evidence of a medical diagnosis. But you may need to show evidence of how it affects you.

Getting evidence for disability

It may feel unclear whether your migraine could be classed as a disability. It's worth talking to your employer about exactly how your migraine affects your normal, day-to-day activities. Keeping a record or diary of your migraine symptoms may help.

Sometimes your employer may want to see evidence that shows you have a disability. You can ask for a report or letter from your GP or consultant to support with this. This may explain:

- how long you have had migraine and how long it's expected to last
- what would happen if you stopped any medication you're taking
- the effect your migraine has on your everyday activities.

What does it mean if I'm classed as having a disability?

The Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 legally protects you from discrimination if you have a disability. The law protects you if you are:

- an employee
- self-employed or a contractor, hired personally to do a job
- applying for a job
- a former employee, for example when applying for references.

It is against the law for your employer to discriminate against you, harass or victimise you due to your disability. Discrimination can take several different forms.

- Your manager treating you less favourably than someone else due to your migraine is an example of **direct discrimination**.
- Putting in a new rule or practice that puts you at a disadvantage because of your migraine is an example of **indirect discrimination**.

Your employer must also consider **reasonable adjustments** to support you in the workplace. These are changes that an employer makes to help meet your needs so that you can perform your role.



Good to know...

Your employer must know or could **'reasonably be expected to know'** you have a disability in order for them to make reasonable adjustments.

Many people feel this is a good reason to tell their employer about their migraine. It's a good idea to keep a written record of requests for reasonable adjustments.

Examples can include:

- allowing flexible working
- changes to your working environment or providing necessary equipment
- not counting migraine-related sickness absence in the same way as other sickness absence, or extending the number of sickness absences that triggers a review.

Some of the tips on page 6 can also be considered as reasonable adjustments. Before talking to your manager about reasonable adjustments, think carefully about what support you need. It may help to make some notes or keep a diary to help identify potential triggers beforehand. You can also use our checklist as a guide.

Your employer might ask you to have an **occupational health assessment** to assess your needs and advise on reasonable adjustments. They might have their own occupational health service, or they may use an outside agency.

What counts as 'reasonable' can depend on the organisation, the situation and your own individual circumstances. It might not be feasible for an employer to make every change. Your employer might not be able to make changes due to cost, resource, if it's not practical or if it changes the basic nature of your job. The Access to Work grant can help organisations with the costs of making reasonable adjustments.

Aim to work together with your manager or employer to decide what adjustments might be reasonable. If a request is refused, they should be able to explain why. They have a legal duty to find other ways to support you.

It's a good idea to follow up in writing after any meetings or discussions so you have a record of what has been said and agreed.

What if I'm not happy with how I'm being treated at work?

It's always best to try and resolve things with your manager first. For example, if a reasonable adjustment is refused, talk to your manager about alternative adjustments that may be possible instead. If you don't feel like you are being treated fairly, you may want to raise it with another manager in your workplace, or your Human Resources (HR) department or representative.

If you are still not happy with the outcome, you may want to consider making a formal complaint. Ask your employer for their grievance policy, which should outline how to do this. Your employer should then arrange a grievance meeting to discuss your concerns. Acas has more information on discipline and grievances at work.

What is occupational health?

Occupational health is a type of medical service that provides impartial and confidential advice and support in workplaces. An occupational health adviser can advise on reasonable adjustments employers can make for people with a disability. An employer may have their own occupational health service, or they may use an outside agency.



"I think it's important for managers to know that it doesn't have to be a large change – small changes and adjustments are great to help someone to get through the working day when they do have a migraine attack."

Misba



An extra note about flexible working...

Flexible working could be something you ask for as a reasonable adjustment, due to disability. But all employees have a legal right to request flexible working, even if they don't have a disability. This is covered under different legislation. Employers don't have to accept flexible working requests. But they must consider them in a 'reasonable way'.

Is my job at risk due to migraine?

Legally, employers are not allowed to do the following, just because of a person's disability:

- discipline someone
- dismiss someone
- make someone redundant
- force someone to retire or resign.

But what if you are unable to perform your job to expected standards due to your migraine?

It's important to first talk to your employer about reasonable adjustments they can make to support you in your role. If your employer still has concerns, they must then carry out a **capability or performance procedure**. This is to make sure they follow a fair and reasonable process. It involves talking to you about your migraine and gathering any evidence of reasonable adjustments they have made. They will also look at any medical or occupational health reports.

Formal performance management or dismissal should be a last resort if after any support has been put in place, you are still unable to carry out your job effectively.

If you think you have been unfairly dismissed, you can consider making an employment tribunal claim for unfair dismissal and disability discrimination. It's a good idea to seek specialist legal advice before doing this. We include details of organisations that offer advice and support in this area on page 16.

Finding migraine-friendly employers

If you are looking for new employment, look for organisations that promote themselves as being disability-friendly. You can even check whether they have signed The Migraine Trust's workplace pledge, to show they support people with migraine. Your local Jobcentre can help find suitable employment for people with a disability.

Who can provide support?



- Your line manager
- HR department
- Your union, if you have one
- Occupational health department or adviser
- External organisations, like Acas and the Equality Advisory and Support Services (EASS)

A summary of your legal rights



- Migraine may be classed as a disability, depending on frequency and severity of attacks.
- You may need to show your employer evidence of how your migraine affects you.
- Being classed as a disability means you are legally protected from discrimination because of your migraine.
- Your employer also has a legal obligation to consider reasonable adjustments to support you at work if you have a disability.
- You have a right to request flexible working, whether or not your migraine is classed as a disability.
- There are processes your employer should follow if you are unable to perform your job properly due to migraine. This is to ensure you are treated fairly.
- You can consider making an employment tribunal claim if you feel you have been unfairly dismissed.

How we can help

Our **support services** are here for everyone with migraine. We offer information and support on managing your migraine in the workplace, but we are unable to provide specific legal advice. Find out more at migrainetrust.org/support

We have a range of information and resources for both employees and employers, including our managing your migraine at work checklist and migraine information for workplaces factsheet. Find out more at migrainetrust.org/migraineandwork

Want to make a difference in your workplace?

You could encourage your employer to:

- share our resources and details of the support services we offer
- sign The Migraine Trust's workplace pledge
- book a migraine awareness session for staff
- host a fundraising event at work
- match any fundraising by employees for The Migraine Trust
- become a Corporate Partner of The Migraine Trust.

See migrainetrust.org/workplace to find out more.

Further information and support

Acas

Acas (the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) gives free, impartial advice about workplace rights, rules and best practice. Acas also advise and provide assistance to help settle employment disputes.

- Helpline: 0300 123 1100
- [acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)

Citizens Advice

Provides practical information and advice on a range of issues relating to work, for people living in England, Scotland and Wales.

- [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Disability Law Service

Registered UK charity providing free legal advice to disabled people, including on employment.

- [dls.org.uk](https://www.dls.org.uk)

Disability Rights UK

The UK's leading Disabled Person's Organisation, providing information and guidance on a range of disability related issues.

- [disabilityrightsuk.org](https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

Equalities Advisory and Support Services

Government-commissioned organisation offering advice and support on issues relating to equality and human rights.

- Helpline: 0808 800 0082
- [equalityadvisoryservice.com](https://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Independent statutory body responsible for enforcing the Equality Act 2010 in England, Scotland and Wales. Provides expert information, advice and support on discrimination and human rights issues.

- [equalityhumanrights.com](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Provides general information and advice about equality legislation in Northern Ireland.

- Tel: 028 90 500 589
- [equalityni.org](https://www.equalityni.org)

gov.uk

Contains a wide range of general information about government services including disability rights information, sickness pay and handling employment disputes. It also provides general information about welfare benefits and the Access to Work scheme.

- [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

Labour Relations Agency

Providing free, impartial advice and services relating to employment practice in Northern Ireland.

- [lra.org.uk](https://www.lra.org.uk)

nidirect

Government services in Northern Ireland, including disability rights and discrimination.

- [nidirect.gov.uk](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

The Brain Charity

UK charity for people with neurological conditions, offering support and legal advice.

- [thebraincharity.org.uk](https://www.thebraincharity.org.uk)

Please note that the inclusion of any organisation does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by The Migraine Trust. We have provided these for information purposes only and not as recommendations.

About The Migraine Trust

The Migraine Trust is dedicated to helping people affected by migraine. We are the only UK migraine charity providing information and support, campaigning for awareness and change, and funding and promoting research.

Visit our website to subscribe to email updates and news, access migraine information and to learn more about The Migraine Trust including our support services, research and events.

 www.migrainetrust.org

 **Helpline 0808 802 0066**

Have you found this information helpful, or is there anything missing? Let us know by following the QR code to complete our feedback survey. You can also email any feedback to:

feedback@migrainetrust.org



This information has been written by The Migraine Trust Information and Support Services team and reviewed by our reviewer panel.

Our information has been awarded the PIF TICK quality mark for trustworthy health information.



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the
migraine
trust

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