

Stages of migraine attack

There can be three or four stages of a migraine attack that lead on from each other. These may include prodrome, aura, headache and postdrome stages.



About the stages of migraine attack

The stages of a migraine attack can be well defined. But not everyone will experience every stage or find it easy to identify them. Each stage can vary in how long and how bad it is. The combination of stages you get may also vary from attack to attack. Overall, a migraine attack typically lasts between four hours and three days, without effective treatment.

Recognising the different stages of a migraine attack can help with making a diagnosis. Understanding the different stages can also help you to be prepared and know when to take acute medication or adapt your activities.

With many migraine symptoms continuing through every stage of an attack, it's important to take the time you need to fully recover.



Prodrome or premonitory stage

The prodrome stage is sometimes described as the warning stage. It can help to warn you that a migraine attack is starting. You may notice certain symptoms in the prodrome stage. These can include:

- feeling very tired (fatigued)
- finding it difficult to think or concentrate
- being more sensitive to light, sound or smell
- neck pain or stiffness
- changes in your mood
- feeling sick (nausea)
- yawning
- food cravings
- feeling dizzy
- feeling thirsty
- passing more urine (wee).

You may notice these symptoms hours or sometimes days before the other stages of a migraine attack begin. You may find it helps to predict when an attack is starting.



Aura

Up to a third of people with migraine may experience an aura stage as part of their migraine attacks. These symptoms are temporary and may include:

- changes in sight such as blind spots and flashing or flickering lights
- numbness or pins and needles
- problems with speech
- hearing loss or changes, such as tinnitus (ringing or buzzing in your ears)
- dizziness or vertigo (sensation of spinning and poor balance).

Most aura symptoms last from five to 60 minutes. Aura usually happens before the headache stage. But it can happen at the same time, or even after the headache has started.

It's also possible to have aura symptoms without any headache at all. This is often referred to as 'silent migraine'.



Headache or main attack stage

This stage involves headache, which is usually moderate or severe in intensity. The headache in migraine is often described as a throbbing pain and is made worse by movement. It's often on one side of the head, especially at the start of an attack. However, you can get pain on both sides, or all over the head.

The headache may be associated with feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting), and you may feel sensitive to light, sound and smell.



Postdrome or recovery stage

This is the final stage of a migraine attack. After the headache and other symptoms have resolved, you may feel drained, fatigued or even 'hungover' for some time. It can take hours or days for these feelings to disappear. Symptoms can be similar to those of the first (prodrome) stage. Fatigue, difficulty concentrating and mood changes are common symptoms. You may continue getting symptoms such as sensitivity to light and sound in this phase too.

Find out more

You can read more about the stages of migraine on our website at:

- migrainetrust.org/stages-of-a-migraine-attack

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If you have feedback on our information, please get in touch at: feedback@migrainetrust.org

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.

