

# Migraine at work

## guidance for managers

### This guide

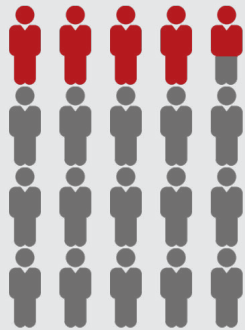
**Whether you're a line manager, supervisor, team leader or managing a small business, chances are you've worked with many people with migraine (whether you know about it or not).**

**Migraine is a common, debilitating but manageable condition.** It has a significant, but addressable, cost on people's working lives and business performance.

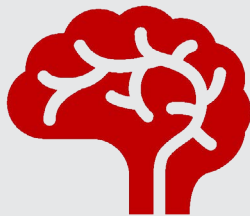
This guide is designed to help you understand **what** migraine is, **why** it matters to you and your organisation, and **how** to help individuals with migraine improve their experience and contribution at work.

Commissioned and funded by Novartis Pharmaceuticals UK Ltd, the guide was independently produced by the Work Foundation, following the publication of their breakthrough research report 'Society's Headache' in 2018. It has been developed with the help of patient groups, health experts and employers representing more than 1.3 million employees in the UK. We are very grateful for their input.

## The impact of migraine in the UK



An estimated **23.3%** of adults aged 15-69 have migraine.<sup>1</sup>



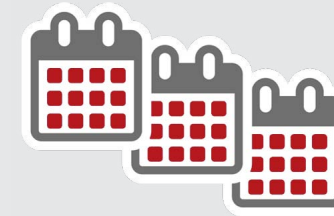
**Migraine is more common than diabetes, epilepsy and asthma combined.**<sup>2</sup>



Migraine is the **3<sup>rd</sup> most common disease** in the world.<sup>3</sup>



Migraine is the **2<sup>nd</sup> highest cause of years lived with disability** worldwide & the highest among women aged 15-49.<sup>4</sup>



Each year, an estimated **86m equivalent workdays** are lost due to migraine-related absenteeism and presenteeism (being present but not able to work at full capacity).<sup>5</sup>



The **indirect costs of migraine** are estimated at just under **£8.8bn** per annum.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Work Foundation. (2018). Society's Headache. Retrieved October 2019. Calculated using a weighted average of Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study 2016 data.

<sup>2</sup> Migraine Action. (2010). Migraine in the Workplace.

<sup>3</sup> Work Foundation. (2018). Society's Headache. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

## What is migraine?<sup>7</sup>

For many people the main feature is a **severe throbbing headache** which can last from four to 72 hours.



Symptoms may include **disturbed vision, sensitivity to light, sound and smells, feeling nauseous and vomiting.**



Symptoms vary from **person to person** and individuals may have different symptoms in different attacks.



Migraines may change in **length and frequency**, with most people symptom-free between attacks.



Migraine is complex and **treatments can differ from person to person.** There is currently no cure for migraine.



## A migraine friendly workplace

**With the right information and support, most people with migraine can manage their condition and work effectively.**

A good working environment uses **'high performance working practices'**<sup>8</sup> to encourage shared responsibility between employers and workers and foster diversity.

People with migraine should not, therefore, be singled out unnecessarily, but benefit from a people-centred management style that supports talent.<sup>9</sup>

To create a healthy workplace culture, organisations need to:<sup>10</sup>

- **promote good health and wellbeing**, encouraging workers to live a healthy lifestyle
- support workers to **take preventative action**, such as regular exercise
- ensure **ongoing health management over time**, so that plans are kept under regular review



Sickness absence policies should be developed so that people with long term health conditions, such as migraine, are not put at a disadvantage.<sup>11</sup>

Failure to support workers with health conditions can be costly, leading to problems with retention – as well as poor morale and reduced productivity amongst the workforce at large.<sup>12</sup> Employers also have a duty of care and a legal responsibility to ensure workers are treated equally and fairly.<sup>13</sup>

### High Performance Working practices<sup>14</sup>



**Increase autonomy and control** to help workers manage their workload and triggers



**Ensure demands are manageable** to reduce the risk of stress acting as a trigger



**Provide social support** to help workers manage their condition



**Offer flexible working** to enable workers to manage when and where they work

<sup>7</sup> NHS. (2019). *Conditions: Migraine*. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Institute for Employment Studies. (2004). *High Performance Work Practices*. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Work Foundation. (2018). *Society's Headache*. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Work Foundation. (2019). *Migraine's impact on employment in Europe*. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Migraine Trust. (2018). *Migraine: Help at work*. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Migraine Trust. (2018). *Migraine: Help at work*. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>13</sup> DWP. (2019). *Guidance: Employing disabled people and people with health conditions*. Retrieved October 2019.


<sup>14</sup> Work Foundation. (2018). *Society's Headache*. Retrieved October 2019.

# Migraine triggers and support measures

**As well as common triggers for migraine, there are common support measures that can help people with migraine.**

However, as symptoms will vary, it is important to speak to individuals to understand which could apply to them. People with migraine may find it helpful to keep a migraine diary to help identify triggers and support needs.

## Common migraine triggers<sup>15</sup>




**Not enough or changing sleep patterns**




**Irregular meal times**



**Being dehydrated**



**Artificial light and glare e.g. screens**



**Loud noise**



**Additives, caffeine and alcohol**



**Stress**




**Lack of exercise**

## Common support measures<sup>16</sup>



**Keeping a migraine diary**



**Access to a quiet room**




**Flexible working hours & location**




**Regular food & water breaks**



**Seeking occupational health expertise**



**Time off for medical appointments**



**Regular one-to-one meetings**



**Well ventilated environment**

<sup>15</sup> Migraine Trust. Common Triggers. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Migraine Trust. (2018). Migraine: Help at work. Retrieved October 2019.

## Your role as a manager

### Being a manager brings responsibilities to ensure good health management, to meet individual needs.

A **management style based on trust** is essential for someone to feel comfortable about discussing their condition and gaining the support they need.<sup>17</sup> An open, empowering management style is also likely to increase employee engagement and reduce stress.<sup>18</sup>

This means, taking a sensitive and proactive approach to identifying the needs of individuals in the workplace, encouraging **a shared responsibility** for creating a work environment that enables everyone to perform at their best.

When a team member reveals that they experience migraine, **one of the best things you can do is listen to them**. Make time to have a confidential discussion about how their migraine impacts on them and the ways in which you can support them to manage their condition.

You can ask them if they want a colleague or workplace representative present at this meeting. You may also want to **seek specialist support from an HR or occupational health professional**, or look at other sources of advice and support (see useful links section).



## Good practice<sup>19</sup>

Below are some examples of good practice, where managers discuss individual needs and put in place practical adjustments based on those needs.

**Since starting shift work at a warehouse, Josh was experiencing an increased number of migraines which resulted in him taking more sick leave.**

Following a conversation with his boss, Steve, Josh started a migraine diary. His diary showed that working through breaks was a trigger for his migraines.

Steve decided to ask the wider team about potential changes that may improve the working environment for everyone. As a result, all workers are encouraged to take regular breaks during their shifts and the company now provides a water cooler.

**Team leader, Debra, noticed changes in one of her valued team members, Layla. Following a discussion with Layla, she discovered this was due to migraine.**

After looking into the condition, Debra worked with Layla to make changes to help manage her symptoms.

When Layla has a severe migraine, Debra encourages her to return to work at a gradual pace and to work from home. To support this, the team now use file-sharing and have access to one another's calendars.

<sup>17</sup> DWP with CIPD. (2018). Recruiting, managing and developing people with a disability or health condition. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>18</sup> CMI. (2016). The Quality of Working Life. Retrieved October 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Examples informed by our interviews with patient groups, health experts and employers.

## A Migraine Action Plan<sup>20</sup>

**This template can support conversations to understand and take practical steps to address migraines.**

It should be **drafted by the individual**, with the help of a trusted colleague and health professional where appropriate, and then **discussed, revised and agreed with their manager**. The plan should be held confidentially and **regularly reviewed**.

**1. How might migraines impact on your work?** (e.g. find it difficult to concentrate, visual problems, vomiting or nausea)

**3. What can be done to help you minimise migraine attacks at work?** (e.g. move working area to increase natural light, taking a lunch break)

**5. Are there any warning signs that your manager/colleagues might notice before you experience a migraine attack?** (e.g. dizziness, fatigue, confusion)

**2. Is there anything that triggers migraine for you?** (e.g. lack of sleep, irregular eating times, loud noise)

**4. What would you like work colleagues to know about your condition?** (e.g. inform trusted colleagues, keep it confidential, brief the team on migraine)

**6. If your manager/colleagues notice warning signs – what should they do?** (e.g. talk to me discreetly about it)

<sup>20</sup> Based on: Mind. (2018). Wellness Action Plan and Employer Guidance. Retrieved October 2018.

## A Migraine Action Plan (continued)

**7. What support could be put in place to help you manage symptoms?** (e.g. access to a quiet room, flexible working hours)

**8. What steps can you take if you start to feel unwell at work?** (e.g. take a break, ask a colleague for support)

Staff signature

Manager signature

Date

Date to be reviewed

## Useful links

**Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)** provides free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees.

**Helpline: 0300 123 1100** [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

**CIPD** is the professional body for HR and people development and provides resources for people managers on all HR issues.

[www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

**CMI (Chartered Management Institute)** offers practical solutions for individual managers, employers and education providers.

[www.managers.org.uk](http://www.managers.org.uk)

**Fit for Work** is a government-funded initiative to support people in work with health conditions. They offer free, expert and impartial work-related health advice.

**Advice line: 0800 032 6235**

[www.fitforwork.org/blog/supporting-sufferers-of-migraine-at-work](http://www.fitforwork.org/blog/supporting-sufferers-of-migraine-at-work)

**GOV.UK** offers guidance on employing disabled people and people with health conditions and the Equality Act 2010.

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/employing-disabled-people-and-people-with-health-conditions/employing-disabled-people-and-people-with-health-conditions](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employing-disabled-people-and-people-with-health-conditions/employing-disabled-people-and-people-with-health-conditions)

**Migraine Trust** is a charity providing information and support for people affected by migraine in the UK, including an Employment Advocacy Toolkit.

[www.migrainetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/employment-advocacy-toolkit-the-migraine-trust.pdf](http://www.migrainetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/employment-advocacy-toolkit-the-migraine-trust.pdf)

**NHS** gives a medical overview of migraine, its symptoms, causes, diagnosis, treatment, complications and prevention.

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/Migraine](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Migraine)

**NHS Health at Work for Business** represents occupational health teams working in the NHS and supports the Government's approach to health and work.

[www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/support-for-business.asp](http://www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/support-for-business.asp)

**WorkSMART** is a job advice app for everyone at work. It is backed by the Trades Union Congress, the umbrella body for Britain's unions.

[www.worksmart.org.uk](http://www.worksmart.org.uk)