

National Migraine and Headache Awareness Month

June is National Migraine and Headache Awareness Month. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is estimated that almost half of the adult population have experienced a headache at least once within the last year. These headaches can range from some minor discomfort all the way to a debilitating migraine. Headaches and migraines alike can be caused by a multitude of things, such as caffeine intake, lack of sleep, computer screens, diet, alcohol consumption, and time of year.

“They can be associated with seasonal triggers. If you have allergies and you frequently have congestion in your nose, you want to take care of that because that could also be a trigger for migraines that come and go,” says Tina Doretti, an OSF HealthCare family medicine APN.

In addition to managing seasonal allergies, Doretti also recommends monitoring your mental health to reduce the risk of stress-related headache and migraine triggers.

“I think addressing stress and anxiety and also overall mental health and wellness is important because stress is also a factor that contributes to migraines and headaches. Get enough sleep, drink enough water, and discuss a plan with your primary care provider if these continue to be a problem,” Doretti adds.

But how do you differentiate between a headache and a migraine? Migraines are a fairly common. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that approximately 15% of Americans age 18 years or older experience migraines or some other form of severe headache.

According to the National Headache Foundation, a migraine is considered a chronic and episodic disorder that consists of recurrent headaches lasting four to 72 hours, typically occurring on one side of your head, and decreasing your ability to function in everyday situations. Symptoms usually can include nausea, vomiting, and light and sound sensitivity.

Because a headache or migraine can completely throw off your day if it does not go away, people tend to take measures into their own hands to try to get rid of the headache on their own. Although resorting to over-the-counter headache medications and an extra cup or two of coffee may seem like the logical thing to do, overdoing it can make your pain linger even longer.

“You could actually have rebound headaches if you try to treat them at home. Sometimes overmedicating with over-the-counter medication for a period of time, or even using some of those abortive therapies that we use for migraines, can cause a rebound headache,” warns Doretti.

Each person is unique. Therefore, headaches are also unique to each individual. Doretti recommends tracking your headaches or migraines in a journal when they occur. It is important to take note of potential causes such as what you ate that day, your caffeine and water consumption, how much sleep you got the night before, your stress levels, and allergies.

“Definitely make sure that you figure out what the triggers are. Identify if they’re triggers and if it is something you can correct on your own. But don’t let these headaches kind of be that monkey on your back. Yes you are able to function with some sort of headache – but if it’s interrupting your everyday function, then it’s really important to talk with your primary care provider about a plan to see how they can be reduced,” Doretti says.

So when does a headache or migraine resort to the point of needing to go to a nearby urgent care or emergency room?

“If you do have these intractable migraines where you can’t get a handle on improving them, then most certainly you should seek medical attention – because with the associated symptoms of nausea and vomiting, dehydration could be a factor. So don’t wait it out if it gets too bad,” advises Doretti.

To find a healthcare provider or urgent care near you, go to www.osfhealthcare.org.