

# Are You at Risk for Chronic Migraine?

## How to tell if your episodic migraine is progressing to chronic

Migraine is a disabling disease that affects more than 36 million Americans. Most people living with migraine have a few attacks per month, but for the over 4 million in the population with chronic migraine, half or more of their days each month are marked by debilitating migraine pain and neurological symptoms.



## The Difference Between Episodic and Chronic Migraine

Whether a migraine is chronic or episodic is defined by the frequency of headache episodes.

**Episodic Migraine**  
**< 15 headaches a month**

**Chronic Migraine**  
**> 15 headaches a month**

**At least 8 of those headaches should have migraine features such as:**

- Throbbing headache
- Sensitivity to light and sound
- Nausea and vomiting



## Migraine Progression

Studies estimate that 2.5% of people with episodic migraine will transition to chronic migraine every year.

The most obvious sign that your migraine is progressing is the appearance of more frequent migraine attacks. If you notice a change in your migraine frequency, it's time to find a headache specialist to explore your options.

# 3 Steps to Take if You Suspect Your Migraine is Becoming Chronic

## 1. Work With a Headache Specialist to Understand Your Migraine

Getting an accurate diagnosis is the first step towards understanding your migraine and developing a treatment plan that works for you. Prepare for your appointment by keeping a daily headache diary to track the number of headaches you're experiencing each month and identify potential migraine triggers

## 2. Address Your Risk Factors

There are several risk factors that increase the likelihood episodic migraine progressing to chronic migraine. Addressing these risk factors early can reduce your risk and improve the efficacy of migraine treatment:

- Depression and Anxiety
- Other pain disorders
- Head/Neck injury
- Obesity
- Asthma
- Snoring
- Stressful life events
- Caffeine
- Accute Medication Overuse

Using acute medications too frequently can result in medication overuse headache, which accelerates the progression to chronic migraine. Keep track of the number of prescription and over-the-counter medicines you're taking, and talk to your doctor about alternative migraine treatments.

## 3. Understand Your Triggers

For many people, certain foods or behaviors can increase the likelihood of a migraine attack. Knowing your triggers can help you make lifestyle changes to avoid them, which can reduce your symptoms. Track the events preceding each migraine attack in a headache journal, paying special attention to these common triggers:

- Stress
- Certain foods and skipping meals
- Caffeine and Alcohol
- Dehydration
- Smell
- Changes in weather or barometric pressure
- Sleep deprivation
- Time zone changes
- Menstruation



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The mission of the American Migraine Foundation is to mobilize a community for patient support and advocacy, as well as drive and support impactful research that translates into advances for patients with migraine and other disabling diseases that cause severe head pain. Visit [americanmigraine.org](https://americanmigraine.org) for more resources for people living with migraine and their supporters.

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