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My child has headache (or migraine). What should I know?

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What are migraines?

Migraines, also called headaches, can occur in adults and children.

Which are the symptoms of migraines in children?

Migraine symptoms vary according to the child's age. In teenagers, symptoms to be more similar to those of adults: headache generally begins slowly and affects only a side of the head but, in a third of teenagers, it affects both sides of the head.

Some girls have migraine every month, close to the beginning of their menstrual cycle: they are called "menstrual migraines".

In children, migraines can cause nausea, vomits and stomach ache and sensitivity to light and noises; headache can affect the whole head or just part of it, as the forehead or some of its sides.

No matter what the age is, most children who have migraine feel better if they sleep in a dark quiet room.

Some children, before migraine begins, have the so called "AURA". An aura is a sensation or strange symptom that warns the child about the onset of a migraine. Every child's aura is different but, in most situations, auras affect vision. As part of an aura, a child could see flashing lights, bright spots, zigzag lines or lose part of the vision. Some children can feel drowsiness and lip tingling, the lower part of the face and their fingers. The aura usually lasts few minutes and disappears when headache begins.

Must my child visit a doctor?

Your child should visit a doctor if:

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- They have a headache that begins after a head injury.
- They wake up at night with the pain, which is sudden and severe and some symptoms, as vomits, pain or neck rigidity, appear.
- They have changes in the vision or double vision, confusion, lack of balance or fever over 38°.
- They have headache once or more times a month or they are under 3 years old.

Must my child have any medical test?

Probably not. Your child's doctor could possibly determine the cause of the headache when examining and informing them about their symptoms. However, if the doctor thinks that your child has a serious problem, it is likely that they advise an image study, as a nuclear magnetic resonance image or a tomography.

What can I do in order to help my child when they have a migraine?

When your child migraine begins:

- Make them rest in a dark quiet room.
- Make them sleep.
- Give them medicines which have been advised by your doctor.

How are child migraines treated?

There are many medicines that can mitigate migraine pain. There are also medicines which can help to avoid that migraines occur. Your child suitable medicine will depend on the frequency they suffer from migraine and its severity. If your child has migraines frequently, visit your doctor to find the suitable treatment; do not try to deal with the problem on your own giving them painkillers that can be purchased without prescription. In fact, if your child takes those medicines frequently, they can have more headaches in the future.

Is there anything I can do in order to avoid that my child has migraine?

Maybe. Migraines can sometimes be triggered by some food or activities that children do.

Some possible strategies in order to prevent headache are:

- Drinking enough liquids and trying to avoid drinks with caffeine.
- Keeping regular sleep times and trying that your child rests enough hours daily. Avoiding excessive tiredness. Sleeping too much is negative as well.
- Scheduled and balanced meal timetables. Avoiding missing meals.
- Scheduling and organizing their activities sensibly.

Try to avoid situations that trigger headaches. Not everybody is the same in this situation so it is useful that you learn to recognise the factors which affect your child. These are some of them which often provoke them so it is

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good if you try to avoid them:

- Strong odours, paints, cleaning agents, etc.
- Excessively bright or flashing lights.
- Excessive physical exercise (tiring).
- Situations which provoke you stress.

There are three group of food that can trigger a headache. If you see that any of them affects them, avoid them:

- Food that is rich in tyramine, for instance, cheese, specially fermented and matured, dairy products as yoghurt, cream and ice cream, chocolate, nuts.
- Food that is rich in nitrites, for instance, sausages.
- Food that is rich in glutamate, for instance, Chinese food.

In order to determine which are the possible triggering factors, keep a diary about your child's headaches: MY CHILD'S HEADACHE DIARY. Write every time that your child has a headache and also write the following information:

- The time when it started and ended.
- In which part of the head they were affected, for instance, left side, right side, both sides or behind the eyes.
- How they felt headache, for instance, "as hammering" or "acute".
- What they had and did before the headache began.
- What the pain severity was.
- What you did in order to try to help, for instance, make your child rest in a dark room.
- What medicine you gave them, if any, indicating the medicine name and amount.
- Any other symptoms that your child has had with headache, for instance, lip numbness.

After keeping the diary for some time, check it and see if you can detect any food or event that might cause the headache. Then, try to avoid those triggering factors to see if the headaches appear with less frequency. Share the

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diary with your child doctor. It can help you to understand your child's headaches and to choose the best treatment for them.

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