

Louisiana Pharmacists Association

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Louisiana Pharmacists Association Educates Patients about Migraines

Migraines result from the dilation of the blood vessels and the release of chemicals from nerve fibers around these blood vessels.(2) They are very painful usually described as an intense pulsing or throbbing sensation.(5) Nearly 36 million Americans suffer from migraines. Migraines are not limited to any age group, but they do occur more commonly in women than men. Many people experiencing migraine headaches also have depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and fatigue. The World Health Organization lists migraine as one of the 20 most disabling illnesses.(1)

Symptoms associated with migraine can occur before the actual headache begins, during the headache, and after the headache.(4) Symptoms such as sensitivity to light, sound, and smell are most common.(2) Migraine auras are perceptual disturbances that form in about 5 to 20 minutes and last no more than 60 minutes. An aura can manifest as confusing thoughts, perception of strange lights, lines in the visual field, blind spots, pins and needles sensations in the arms or legs, stiffness in the shoulders, or unpleasant smells.(2,4,5) Migraine descriptions often include: moderate to severe pain (often on one side of the head), increased pain during physical activity, inability to perform activities, nausea and vomiting.(4)

People with migraine often note headache triggers such as stress, anxiety, hormonal changes, bright light, fasting, changes in sleep patterns, smoking, alcohol, and certain

foods.(4,5) Avoidance of these triggers is sometimes useful in prevention.(5) Non-drug treatment for migraine headaches can include ice, rest or sleep in a dark, quiet location. Behavioral interventions can also be useful in select patients as preventative measures for migraine.(2)

For mild migraine, over-the-counter analgesics can treat the symptoms of pain. Ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin, or a combination of aspirin, acetaminophen and caffeine are commonly used medications.(2) Antiemetic medications may also be used to prevent nausea and vomiting.(4) Moderate to severe migraine attacks may need the use of serotonin agonists, known as 'triptans'.(1,2) Medications such as sumatriptan, zolmitriptan, naratriptan, almotriptan, frovatriptan, and eletriptan are agonists of the serotonin1B and serotonin1D receptors involved in the pathology of migraine. Activating these receptors leads to constriction of the blood vessels and inhibition of pain signals.(2,4) Another class of drugs for moderate to severe migraine are the ergot alkaloids. Ergotamine works as a nonselective serotonin1 receptor agonist constricting blood vessels and decreasing inflammation.(2) Opioids including oxycodone, hydromorphone, and butorphanol are used to provide relief when other therapies are unsuccessful or contraindicated in relieving the migraine.(2) Opioids must be used carefully due to the high rate of physical and emotional dependence that can develop in this setting.

Drug-based prevention may be recommended for patients with chronic migraines that result in significant disability or for intermittent migraine (e.g., menstrual migraine).(2) Drugs originally developed for epilepsy, depression or high blood pressure are used for prevention of attacks.(5) Some of these medications include: topiramate, propranolol, timolol, and valproic acid.(1,2) Botulinum toxin A (Botox®) has also been used to prevent the frequency, severity, and duration of migraine as well.(4) A detailed discussion with both physician and pharmacist is an important step in understanding the risks and benefits of these treatments.

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The Louisiana Pharmacists Association, established in 1882, strives to promote the interests of all pharmacists of the State of Louisiana. For more information about the LPA and its benefits, contact Julie Fuselier or Phyllis Perron, LPA Co-Executive Directors at 225/346-6883 or visit our website at www.louisianapharmacists.com.

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