Migraine is three times more common in women than in men. Migraine affects over 30% of women over their lifetime. Migraine is most troublesome during people’s most productive years (late teens to 50s). Given the number of working women living with migraine, ensuring access to proper care pathways represents not just an economic, but also a gender equity priority.

About Migraine

A migraine is a severe headache that often comes with nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light. It can last hours or days. Doctors don’t know the exact cause of migraine headaches, although they seem to be related to changes in your brain and to your genes.

There are two types of migraine: migraine with aura and migraine without aura: the former results in aura which is a series of sensory disturbances (i.e. visual disturbances, flashing lights) that occur before a migraine attack, whereas the latter has an absence of warning signs and is the most common form of migraine.

Differences between men and women

Both men and women can suffer from migraine. Yet, as in many other disorders, their experiences are different. Each migraine attack may be different, and each individual responds differently; this is particularly true for men vs women.

Women suffer longer attack duration than men and a higher recurrence rate. The difference in attack frequency between age groups is significant for women but not for men migraineurs. Migraine attack duration is also age-related: it is longer in women aged 30 and over. In general, the symptoms accompanying migraine (nausea, vomiting, phonophobia, photophobia) are more frequent among women.

Menstrual migraines affect around 20-25% of females with migraines and are associated with greater disability, longer attack duration and are more difficult to treat than non-menstrual migraine attacks.

Impact on work-life: women’s work limitations due to migraine

Migraine is the leading reason for lost days of work among people under 50, as approximately a third of attacks occur during workdays and two-thirds of migraine attacks result in a significant loss of productivity. Chronic migraine sufferers have four times more productive time lost compared to those who have infrequent headaches. As women are three times more likely than men to suffer with migraine, they bear the greatest economic impact.
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