

# Promising news for people who get migraine headaches

Some say it's a spike in your head, others say it's a hot piker in your eye. Every movement makes it throb more. It's called a migraine.

While the precise cause of migraine has not yet been pinpointed, promising strides have been made in the last decade. Migraine takes many forms, so people who suffer from it may experience a combination of symptoms:

- \* severe, on-sided, throbbing headache;
- \* visual disturbances, such as flashing lights,
- \* sensitivity to light and sound;
- \* nausea;
- \* vomiting;
- \* a tingling sensation in one arm or foot, and
- \* pain which get worse with normal movements, like bending down or climbing stairs.

Migraine attacks are brought on by a variety of "triggers" which are unique to each sufferer. These triggers can include certain foods, changes in weather and levels of stress, flashing lights and physical exertion. Women -- twice as likely to have migraine as men -- may notice their attacks occur more often during their monthly cycle.

Migraine affects a sufferer's personal, social and work life. It can be a daily burden, or an occasional terror.

"It generally starts with pain at the back of my shoulders. It starts to move up and I end up with what feels like a spike inside my head, a spike trying to push its way out," says Doreen Wood of Toronto who has suffered from migraine for over 10 years. "I

end up having to go home from work and cancelling any kind of appointments or plans I had for that evening."

The first step for anyone who thinks he or she is suffering from migraine is to be diagnosed by a doctor who may recommend a course of treatment -- and there is some good news here.

With the goal of finding an effective new treatment, researchers at Glaxo, a pharmaceutical manufacturer, spent a total of 20 years exploring a substance called serotonin (a chemical messenger found in the brain), and its possible therapeutic value for such conditions as migraine.

Their effort paid off with the creation of a new medication recently made available in Canada. The medication, Imitrex, is a breakthrough that offers relief from migraine's debilitating symptoms and agonizing pain. Worldwide testing has shown it to be very safe.

"I expect many of my patients will lead far more normal lives because of Imitrex. They won't cancel social engagements, miss work or lose out on family activities because they can't function," says Dr. Robert Nelson, a neu-

rologist affiliated with the Ottawa General Hospital.

"This is the first medication

to offer such a high level of effectiveness, safety and rapid relief for migraine."

## Northern Insights

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**Geography:** Explain the differences in conditions that make the Annapolis Valley famous for its apple production, and the prairie provinces noted for the production of hard wheat.

**English Literature:** Tell in your own words the story of "Damon and Pythias."

What lesson do you learn from this story?

**History:** Who is the Governor-General of Canada? The Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario? The first magistrate of your municipality?

Nelson Rogoza, a school principal we met in our travels

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