

MIGRAINE FACTS AND FICTION

In the past, migraines have been blamed on “migraine personality” or attempts at malingering. However, research on the condition provided healthcare professionals with insights into the neurobiological basis of migraines.

Unfortunately, misconceptions surrounding migraines persist in society and they can have a significant effect on how migraine patients are regarded by doctors and members of the public. The understanding of migraine is greater now and more treatment options exist. However, there is a significant need to raise awareness and remove the stigma attached to this disabling disorder, one that is estimated to affect some 400,000 people in Singapore.

A lack of understanding about the disease led to the development of a number of myths.

- **MYTH: Migraine is just another word for severe headache.**

FACT: Headache is a symptom whereas migraine is a chronic neurological condition. A migraine is associated with many symptoms in addition to headaches such as nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light and sound. A migraine is the result of an imbalance in activity in the brain stem that regulates pain relief and vascular control.

- **MYTH: Migraine is a psychological condition.**

FACT: This is false. Migraine is a recognised neurological condition caused by an abnormally sensitive central nervous system.

- **MYTH: Migraines are an excuse used by individuals who cannot cope with everyday life.**

FACT: Due to a lack of public understanding about migraines, patients are subjected to additional pressures, e.g. workplace prejudice due to absenteeism, relationship problems etc. It is this bias that migraine patients find as difficult to deal with as the pain itself.

- **MYTH: Migraine is an inconvenience, but does not cause serious problems**

FACT: The World Health Organisation rates migraines as one of the top 20 causes of disability worldwide.

- **MYTH: There is nothing you can do about your migraine, you have to live with the disease and its consequences.**

FACT: Effective migraine treatments are available to reduce the frequency, severity and duration of migraines, and improve patients’ ability to carry out daily activities. However, the majority of cases are never diagnosed, and even among those who suffer from moderate or severe migraines, fewer than half are treated optimally.
