

Migraines

All of us have been bothered by an occasional headache, but only a small percentage know what it's like to suffer through a migraine.

Medical experts stress that the exact causes of migraines are unknown, but say that those who suffer from them may have a tendency to be affected by certain triggers such as fatigue, bright lights, weather changes and hypertension.

The bottom line is, more than 38 million experience migraines or some type of tension headache, with two to three million of them experiencing chronic migraines.

To bring the situation to light, the federal government recognizes June as National Migraine and Headache Awareness Month.

Valerie Burns, MD, a general practitioner at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital's Primary Care Clinic, refers to migraine headaches as "a fairly common problem," in this region. Typically, she says, she treats five to 10 patients a week.

"Most people are successfully treated with medications that they can take on an as-needed basis," said Burns, who notes that while men sometimes get migraine headaches, they're far more prevalent in women. "However some people have migraines that are common enough that they take a daily suppression medication."

There's good news, according to Burns, in that injectable medications, recently introduced, seem to be working well.

"Some of those seem to be helping a lot with folks who have not gotten relief from other sources," she said. "Often, these medications will need to be prescribed by a neurologist or a headache expert."

Some symptoms of migraine or tension headaches include:

- Throbbing pain, numbness, weakness
- Sensitivity to light
- Sensitivity to sound
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Vertigo
- Mood changes
- Neck pain
- Vision changes

Experts note that treatment for migraine or tension headaches depends on how often or severe the headache is, the level of the disability the headache may cause and contributing medical conditions.

Over the counter medications such as anti-nausea or Ibuprofen may help with more minor episodes, but those who experience multiple headaches per month lasting more than 12 hours, especially if the symptoms include numbness and weakness should consult a physician.

Burns stresses that while women more frequently suffer from migraines, something known as "cluster headaches," is more common among men.

"They're related to migraines. But they tend to occur in small, frequent clusters, as opposed to migraines," Burns said. "They can be extremely painful, although they tend not to have as many extra-sensory things, like vision changes. It's something we see in men around here."

Another form of migraine, known as an "abdominal migraine," is relatively new, according to Burns.

"I haven't seen any cases. It's a new area of study, of people who have an onset of abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting," she said. "Basically, it's a migraine in your abdomen, but it's thought to be from some of the same causes that cause migraines in your head."

Burns notes that anyone suffering from migraines should contact their medical provider. More often than not, she said, the headaches can be managed.