

## Chronic Migraine

Beginning in the 1970s, it was observed that a large number of patients suffered from very frequent headaches, meaning more days of headache than not. This group of patients made up the dominant group of patients visiting the early headache clinics. Before research told us better, it was assumed that these headaches were caused by too much stress or the patient's inability to handle stress. The theory at the time that the pain came from tight muscles in the neck or around the head, therefore they were called, "muscle contraction" or "tension" headaches.

As headache research matured in the late 80s and through the 90s, these early theories were proven wrong. Electrical readings of the muscles around the head did not show muscle contraction that correlated to the pain. Then it was observed that these patients with frequent low or moderate level headaches also suffered from less frequent severe headaches. These severe headaches were clearly migraine because they had features of sensitivity to light and sound, nausea and even vomiting. The patient themselves could not tell the difference between their so-called "tension headaches" and the beginning of a migraine because they were exactly the same.

Researchers observed during the mid 90s that many of these patients sometimes started out with simple, infrequent migraines, which evolved over time into these syndromes of almost daily lower-level headaches and still occasional (for some actually quite frequent) severe migraines. So the term "transformed migraine" was coined.

It was then believed that migraines worsened over a process of time and the gaps between the headaches were filled in with lesser headaches. This was especially true if the patient took a lot of pain medicines or decongestions (see also the info-motion sheet "Rebound Headaches), which was believed to be the culprit it would cause the headaches to evolve.

By the late 1990s and early this century, further research revealed that patients with these frequent headache syndromes didn't necessarily evolve over time but actually started with frequent headaches in their youth. It was also observed that not all of these patients were over using pain or decongestant medications and the syndrome seemed to run in families. In the face of these new facts, the International Headache Society (a group that supports headache research and classifies headaches) coined the term "Chronic Migraine." This simply refers to the condition where someone has headache on fifteen or more (thus most days) of the month and at least some of those headaches look like migraine because they are either one sided, and/or associated with sensitivity to light, sound, nausea with or without vomiting.

Chronic migraine is a serious problem because it is very common (about 4% of the population has it) and it deeply impacts a person's quality of life. The good news is, more than 80% of the time it is very treatable.