

Migraine sufferers needlessly enduring agonizing pain

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Hundreds of thousands of Australians are needlessly enduring days of agony because they don't know how to prevent migraines, researchers from The Australian National University (ANU) have found.

Once diagnosed migraines can be effectively managed. But the

researchers say sufferers don't recognize the symptoms and so don't seek the right treatment.

Dr. Stephanie Goodhew, from the Research School of Psychology, says the study highlights a need for a public health campaign to inform the community on the treatments and defining features of migraines.

"Migraine is more than a headache. It is an incredibly disabling condition that is also incredibly common—about 15 percent of the population suffer from migraines," said Dr. Goodhew.

"What is unique about it is that among neurological conditions, migraines are one of the most underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed conditions. A lot of people have migraines and don't realize they have it.

"Even when people see their GP it can be missed or undiagnosed.

"People think having headaches is not big deal but having a [migraine](#) is not just a headache. It is a much more [severe pain](#) and can be debilitating."

The study found one-in-five people who suffered migraine did not know about preventative medications they can access—which include Botox.

"This research shows people suffering from migraines often have incomplete or insufficient information about their own condition," said Dr. Goodhew.

"If we can allow people to have greater knowledge about migraine they can advocate for the right level of care."

The study also showed one-in-five people who had migraine did not know about any of the dangers with acute medication treatments, which

are often used to treat the condition.

"In the short term acute medications can massively reduce the pain but there are other risks if those medications are overused," Dr. Goodhew said.

"They can create rebound headaches and they can create the problem that you are seeking to treat.

"If you have migraines talk to your GP, arm yourself with knowledge and ask for a referral to a neurologist."

Dr. Goodhew says she struggled to find a diagnosis and appropriate treatment for her own migraines.

"I have had migraines my whole life, but I only received a diagnosis in my twenties," she said.

"When I have one, looking at light induces a razor sharp pain and I was lucky enough to see a particularly savvy GP that realized I was light sensitive and referred me to a neurologist."

The researcher says the challenge for practitioners is that there is no single biological marker that indicates someone is suffering from a migraine and people experience different symptoms.

"The source of the pain is often unilateral, on one side of the head whereas your standard [headache](#) is all over the head," she said.

"Some people suffer from Aura—visual disturbances, or sensitivity to light. Others might feel nausea or dizzy.

The study is published in *Springer Nature Comprehensive Clinical*

Medicine.

More information: Stephanie C. Goodhew. Migraine Literacy and Treatment in a University Sample, *SN Comprehensive Clinical Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s42399-019-00124-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s42399-019-00124-y)

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