Managing the Workspace with Migraine: One Nurse’s Prescription for Managing Her Migraine Attacks

Roughly 85% of people who experience chronic migraine are women. Many have ongoing health care issues due to severe migraine symptoms. Gail Sarisky, RN, a neonatal nurse and single mom who lives with migraine and has to manage her disease in the workplace, is one of these women.

Why do so many healthcare workers experience migraine attacks at work? Heavy workloads, long shifts, high stress and sleep disturbances make nurses and physicians particularly vulnerable to migraine.¹

90% of people with migraine are unable to work or function normally during a migraine attack.²

Seeing a healthcare provider, especially a neurologist who specializes in migraine, is important. There are also steps you can take outside of a doctor’s office to manage your disease.

Learn your triggers

Gail’s migraine attacks can be triggered by everything from certain foods to the smell of hand sanitizer. Some of her other triggers include dehydration, hunger and bright lights (like the ones in the hospital nursery where she works).

Try not to feel guilty if you can’t identify your triggers or manage your migraine attacks by avoiding them. Migraine is a neurological disease and attacks can occur even without identifiable external triggers present.

Some common triggers for migraine are:

- Hormonal changes
- Overuse of medications
- Stress
- Weather changes
- Irregular sleep
- Diet
- Alcohol
- Dehydration
- Bright or flashing lights
- Odors
- Hormone disruption
- Chocolate
- Environmental stress
- Sugar
- Nutrient deficiencies
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It’s impossible to avoid all triggers, but on days when she’s experiencing a migraine attack or feels like one might be starting, Gail wears sunglasses in the nursery and turns off the fluorescent lights.

Find the right support

Talk with colleagues about your migraine disease so they understand your triggers and symptoms

Have everything you need at work to manage your migraine, including pain management

Consult with HR to learn about leave-of-absence and paid-time-off policies

Take charge of your migraine management by speaking with your healthcare provider

Learn more by visiting the Association of Migraine Disorders or stop by HealthyWomen.org

This resource was created with support from Allergan Foundation and Bausch Foundation.


Stay healthy. Beware of migraines! Keeping a diary can be a helpful way to learn your triggers.

If your migraine attacks substantially impact your ability to work, they may be classified as a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act.