

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

Roughly  
**85%**

of people who experience chronic migraine are women.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

**90%**

of people with migraine are unable to work or function normally during a migraine attack<sup>1</sup>

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.

## 1 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

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.

## 2 Find the right support



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



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



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



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

## 3 Know your rights

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



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

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Gail Sarisky, RN

<sup>1</sup>"Migraine Facts," Migraine Research Foundation, <https://migraineresearchfoundation.org/about-migraine/migraine-facts/>  
<sup>2</sup>"Higher migraine risk in healthcare professionals than in general population: a nationwide population-based cohort study in Taiwan," The Journal of Headache and Pain, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4668247/>