

*Columbus Ophthalmology Associates*  
**HEADACHE**

**What is a headache?**

A headache is one of the most common problems patients experience. It is often believed (incorrectly) that eyestrain or other eye disorders are common causes of headaches. In fact, the need for glasses is not a major cause of a headache.

Headaches can take on many different patterns and it is important to document the exact nature of your symptoms. Some patients have brief but pounding headache symptoms while others have a more dull, but continuous pain. Visual disturbances associated with migraine headaches usually last from 15 minutes to an hour. These patterns of bright flashing lights can cover up half of the peripheral vision. Some patients will see the visual display without a headache, while others may have a severe headache, nausea and even vomiting after the visual phenomenon.

Other less common problems that cause headaches are sinusitis, neurologic disorders, high blood pressure, and jaw abnormalities. A thorough medical evaluation may be necessary to identify the cause so that treatment may begin.

**What is a migraine?**

Migraine headaches can affect the visual system. Spasms of the blood vessel walls, in the head, are causes of the migraine. This causes stimulation of brain cells in the visual cortex which causes visual sensations known as “visual aura.”

Migraines have multiple causes, and in females this is usually related to hormonal changes or birth control pills. Certain foods can trigger a migraine; including wines, cheeses, certain fruits and nuts, chocolate and caffeine products. A diary of your food intake is important in pinpointing the exact cause of these disorders.

**What is an ocular migraine?**

Ocular migraines, which are also known as ophthalmic migraines, are very common. The typical ocular migraine has visual symptoms and may or may not be followed by a headache.

During an ocular migraine, images may appear to be gray or a light may appear to be a pale pastel color. It can produce a variety of visual disturbances including flashing lights, jagged lines, blind spots, “heat waves,” and sparkling lights. The visual disturbance either begins in the peripheral vision and moves centrally or begins in the central vision and moves out peripherally. These visual disturbances can last anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour and usually only affect one eye.

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