
Understanding Headaches and Migraines

MARK FORSHAW



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Understanding Headaches and Migraines

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Contents

About the author vii

Preface ix

About this book xi

Acknowledgements xiii

1 Headache or migraine, acute or chronic? 1

2 Who has headaches and migraines? 11

3 What do they feel like? 23

4 The causes of headache and migraine 37

5 What are the consequences? 57

6 What treatments are available? 63

Where can I get help and information? 75

Checklist 81

References and further reading 85

Index 87

About the author

DR MARK FORSHAW is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Leeds Metropolitan University. He has previously worked at Coventry University and the University of Manchester and has wide research interests within the realm of health psychology. He has published articles on topics as diverse as psychological aspects of physiotherapy and on deafness in newborns, and spends a great deal of his time involved in a number of book-writing projects. He is a Chartered Health Psychologist and an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. His pastimes include writing poetry, abstract painting and world cinema.

Preface

This book should, I hope, be a useful source of information for two groups of people: those wishing to learn more about headaches and migraine because they are prey to them, and those who are simply interested. I would not, and cannot, claim that this book will definitely lead to a cure for your headaches. It might, but there are no guarantees. The information provided here may help you to identify possible causes of your condition and can certainly help you to find out more. Doctors sometimes disagree about the causes of headaches and have a range of opinions on the best ways to cure or ameliorate them. However, those in the medical professions are working hard to come to a conclusion, to establish some 'hard facts' about headaches and their treatment. What you must appreciate are the difficulties associated with this work. There are, it seems, thousands of plausible, potential causes of headaches, and it is sometimes almost impossible to pin-point them in any given individual. We all differ in so many ways, and our lifestyles are diverse. As a health psychologist, I am only too aware of how tiny differences between people can add up to a great deal. When doctors tell you honestly that they do not know the cause of your condition, they are not failing you but simply expressing the huge problem they face when diagnosing and treating many of the illnesses that have a strong psychosocial component. Headaches are not like broken bones; they are as much associated with your mind as with your body. This doesn't mean that headaches are imaginary but that they are *affected*, and sometimes caused by or made worse, by the mind and by our behaviour. If you read the 'Research in Brief' boxes in this book you will understand more what is meant by this.

It is possible to read this book without reading the Research in Brief boxes. They are provided for those readers who are interested in the research that has been conducted by academics and practitioners aiming to find out more about headaches and migraines. There is a mixture of psychological and medical research outlined in Research in Brief. No knowledge of medicine or psychology is required of the reader, although if you are not curious about research into headaches then feel free to ignore these boxes. You can even return to them later, since they largely can stand on their own.

The case histories that you will find in this book are true accounts written by 'expert patients', people who really understand what it is like to experience headaches and migraines. Many of you will empathise with their stories. I