

Migraine at Work

How to talk to your
employer about migraine



What is migraine?

Migraine is a debilitating disease that affects 40 million people in the U.S. This genetic neurological disease with a genetic basis often results in headache, sensitivity to light and sounds, nausea and visual disturbances, among other symptoms. Because the associated pain and symptoms can be so intense, the disease impacts every area of a person's life. In fact, 90% of those with migraine report that the disease interferes with their education, career and social activities. What options are available when migraine impacts your career?

4 workplace accommodations that make an impact

It's no secret that migraine attacks can strike at any time, including while you're at work. In America, 113 million workdays are lost to migraine each year. So here's what you can do to reduce the impact of migraine triggers at work and set yourself up for professional success.



Address harsh lighting

Photophobia, or hypersensitivity to light, is a common symptom among people living with migraine. Bright overhead lights are often triggers. Check with your employer to see if fluorescent light covers can be installed or if you can bring in a desk lamp instead. If your computer screen is an issue, opt for a blue light screen protector or set of blue light filtering eyeglasses.



Reduce smells and sounds

Sensitivity to sound and smell are two other notorious side effects of migraine. If you are sensitive to smells, talk to your manager about removing scented soap and air fresheners from the workplace and moving your seat away from where employees heat or eat their lunches. Discussing migraine with your coworkers can show them why you would appreciate their skipping perfume and other scented products. For sound sensitivity, noise-canceling headphones and a new seat assignment may help. You can also work with your manager to reduce the frequency or volume of recurring noises.



Consider work from home

Working from home allows you to have more control over your environment and will allow you to escape from the loud noises, bright lights and strong smells you might experience during office hours. Advocating for a work from home option or utilizing the benefit if it's already available to you can reduce the number of sick days you take during or after migraine attacks. Employees may also ask to take regular breaks as another way to prevent migraine attacks.



Share your migraine story

It may surprise you to learn how many of your coworkers live with migraine. Sharing your migraine story may help you find allies at work and educate those who may not understand the disabling disease.

Talking to your employer about migraine

- **Know Your Migraine.** Keep track of your migraine attacks and how they affect your work performance. This will help you articulate what specific tasks and scenarios trigger your migraine attacks. Then, identify and request reasonable accommodations from your employer to alleviate situations that may lead to attacks.
- **Know Your Rights.** If your migraine “substantially limits one or more major life activities,” you may be protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Department of Labor’s [Job Accommodation Network](#) describes the ADA and how to request accommodations.
- **Make Your Request.** While talking about migraine can feel very personal, employees need to explain the symptoms and the impact they have on work. This helps employers understand the accommodation request. We recommend starting the conversation by first explaining migraine and how it impacts you, then making your request and finishing with why your request will be helpful to you and the company.



Tips for starting the conversation

- **Start with Education**
 - Prepare a migraine “elevator pitch” to help you briefly explain what migraine is and how it personally impacts you.
 - I live with migraine. It’s not just a headache—it’s a neurological disease with attacks that have many symptoms like...
- **Practice and Prepare**
 - Practicing what to say will help you feel confident when you have this conversation later with your employer. Jot down 3-5 main talking points to bring to the meeting to help you stay aligned with your goals.
- **Request a Meeting**
 - Contact your human resources representative or your direct manager to request a conversation about reasonable accommodations.
- **Have Confidence**
 - You are the foremost expert on your migraine. While it’s not uncommon to feel anxious, guilty or embarrassed during the meeting, have confidence in yourself. Migraine is a disease you did not choose, and you are doing your best to succeed in your career despite living with migraine.

The American Migraine Foundation is partnering with the Global Patient Advocacy Coalition (IHS-GPAC) to make workplaces in the U.S. more accommodating for those impacted by migraine. If you would like your place of employment to be considered for a migraine in the workplace education program, please email us at amf@talley.com or connect us to your human resources department.

AMERICAN  MIGRAINE
FOUNDATION

The mission of the American Migraine Foundation is to mobilize a community for patient support and advocacy, as well as drive and support impactful research that translates into advances for patients with migraine and other disabling diseases that cause severe head pain. Visit americanmigraine.org for more resources for people living with migraine and their supporters.

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