

# Majority of Migraine Sufferers Report Experiencing More Frequent and Severe Migraines During Pandemic

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To coincide with Migraine Awareness Week 2020, Novartis Ireland and The Migraine Association of Ireland conducted a survey online among 120 adults living with migraine in Ireland. The survey shines a light on the impact that pandemic restrictions are having on migraine sufferers in Ireland.

The survey shows that 58% of respondents were getting more frequent migraines, with 69% of this group reporting their symptoms of migraine have become more severe since the pandemic began.

Of those respondents who said their migraine had become more frequent, over four-fifths, or 84%, said that this was due to stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Other factors for triggering a moderate to severe increase in migraines included changes to their routine (67%), a lack of sleep (63%) and increased screen time (60%).

The survey also found that among the individuals who were experiencing more frequent migraines, over one-third (37%) were working from home, 21% said that their working hours had increased during the pandemic and 20% were no longer working. A small number of respondents, 18%, reported a decrease in the frequency of their migraines since the introduction of the COVID-19 restrictions. Similarly, 13% of respondents reported a decrease in the severity of their migraines.

With regard to the availability of appointments with healthcare professionals, 52% of respondents to the survey said that their appointments were either cancelled or postponed since the start of the pandemic. almost half (49%) of all respondents who experienced an increase in migraines reported cancelled or postponed appointments. While only 41% of all respondents have had a virtual health-related consultation since the pandemic began, most of this group (68%) rated their consultation as either 'good' or 'excellent'.

Commenting on the survey results, Patrick Little, CEO, the Migraine Association of Ireland, said; "Our survey shows that the pandemic is proving to be a stressful time for migraine sufferers, with respondents reporting a sharp increase in the frequency and severity of migraines. We are particularly concerned that over four-fifths of those surveyed said that COVID-related stress is causing them to suffer from more frequent migraines, especially at a time when some appointments with healthcare professionals were being postponed. Please contact your GP to talk through your concerns and avail of an online consultation if one is provided, as an increase in frequency or severity of migraines should not be ignored. The Migraine Association of Ireland is here to support people with migraine and other headache disorders, and their carers and families. Email us on [info@migraine.ie](mailto:info@migraine.ie) or call 1850 200 378 if you have any questions or need someone to talk to."

Dr. Martin Ruttledge, Consultant Neurologist, Beaumont Hospital & Hermitage Medical Clinic said; "It's worrying that the survey shows that many migraine sufferers are either experiencing more severe or frequent migraines. However, it is not unexpected, as we know that stress is a very common exacerbating factor in this condition, and it has been a very stressful period for everybody over the last 4-5 months with the Covid pandemic. Migraine, especially the more chronic forms, can be a very disabling neurological disorder, and the

worldwide uncertainty in recent months has only made the situation worse. Patients should seek advice from their primary care doctors and other healthcare professionals if they are struggling. We are still having face to face and virtual consultations in our migraine clinic, and many GPs are reviewing their patients regularly, both in person and by phone. There are effective treatments available for many migraine sufferers and we are still available for our patients.”

Audrey Derveloy, Managing Director, Novartis, said; “The COVID-19 pandemic is having a huge impact on those living with chronic conditions such as migraine, with stress levels causing more frequent headaches. Novartis is proud to partner with the Migraine Association of Ireland to raise awareness about the pandemic’s impact on Ireland’s migraine sufferers and to ensure that those who are living with this condition get the support they need during this difficult time.”

The survey was carried online among 120 adults living with migraine. 34% of respondents were in the 35-44 age group; 40% in the 45-54 age group and the remaining 26% in the 18-24 (3%), 25-34 (17%), and 55-65+ (6%) age group(s). Migraine is a complex neurological condition which affects approximately 12-15% of the Irish population, or roughly half a million people in Ireland<sup>1</sup>. It is Ireland’s fifth leading cause of disability<sup>2</sup> and while it affects people of all ages, migraines are three times more common in women than in men<sup>1</sup>. Despite its high prevalence, migraine remains a misunderstood and under-managed condition<sup>3</sup>.

For more information on migraines and the Migraine Association of Ireland, please visit [www.migraine.ie](http://www.migraine.ie) or call 1850 200 378. Additionally, further information about living with migraine can be found on [www.speakyourmigraine.ie](http://www.speakyourmigraine.ie).

# MIGRAINE SURVEY



If you suffer from migraine, you are not alone. Migraine is Ireland’s fifth leading cause of disability, affecting almost one in eight people.<sup>1</sup>



In the wake of COVID-19, navigating the ‘new normal’ brings its challenges, including common migraine triggers such as stress, anxiety, food and drastic changes of routine,

**56%**

of respondents are getting more frequent migraine attacks



**69%**

of respondents who reported more frequent migraine attacks, also said their symptoms of migraine had become more severe



**82%**

of respondents with more frequent migraine attacks cite COVID-19-related stress as the cause



Other factors for triggering a moderate to severe increase in migraine attacks included

**58%**

increased screen time



**65%**

change to their routine



**63%**

lack of sleep



all of which are likely to be heightened during this time.



The Migraine Association of Ireland and Novartis Ireland recently conducted a survey to understand how the recent changes in day-to-day life caused by COVID-19 have impacted migraineurs.<sup>2</sup>



65%



Among those who experienced more frequent migraine attacks:

**36%** were working from home



**21%** had increased working hours during the pandemic



Over half of all respondents said that their medical appointments were either cancelled or postponed since the start of the pandemic



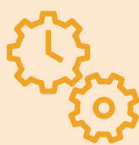
## TIPS FOR MANAGING MIGRAINE



Keep a **migraine diary** to identify any potential migraine triggers



Migraine diaries are available from the Migraine Association of Ireland or by downloading the free Migraine Buddy app.



Establish a **daily routine** and stick to it as much as possible

Practice **good sleep hygiene** go to sleep and wake up at a similar time each day



**Limit screen time** take regular breaks from screens throughout your day



Practice **self-care** exercise regularly, eat regular healthy meals and stay hydrated

**Reduce stress**

Other supports and resources are available on [www.speakyourmigraine.ie](http://www.speakyourmigraine.ie)



or from the Migraine Association of Ireland website [www.migraine.ie](http://www.migraine.ie)





**Consume alcohol in moderation**

practice meditation, yoga or mindfulness to help reduce stress levels





**Speak to your doctor or pharmacist**  
virtually or face to face, if your migraines have increased in frequency or severity

**Stay connected**  
maintain contact with friends, family and support groups





1. Vos T, et al. Global, regional, and national incidence, prevalence, and years lived with disability for 310 diseases and injuries, 1990–2015: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2015 *The Lancet* Volume 388, Issue 10053, 8–14 October 2016, Pages 1545-1602.  
2. Novartis Migraine Patient Survey, Data on File 2020.

IE02/NEU20-009c September 2020




## References:

1. Migraine Association of Ireland, What is a Migraine? <https://migraine.ie/what-is-a-migraine/> [accessed September 2020]
2. Vos T, et al. Global, regional, and national incidence, prevalence, and years lived with disability for 310 diseases and injuries, 1990–2015: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease
3. My Migraine Voice Survey, Novartis Data on File 2017

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