

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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What is the Epilepsy-Migraine connection? Migraine headaches and epilepsy may not seem related at first. However, they sometimes share symptoms and even underlying causes. These conditions also often occur together. Migraine headaches and epilepsy are both chronic (long-term) conditions. People living with either of these conditions may have a wide variety of symptoms. They also have different responses to treatment.

Neurological (brain and nerve) disturbances are common with both conditions. Plus, migraine headaches and epilepsy often affect other parts of the body. For example, the gut, breathing, heart rate, blood flow, and emotions may all be impacted by a seizure or migraine. Despite the ways epilepsy and migraine are similar, there are also key differences between the conditions. Knowing the differences can help you talk to your doctor when you look for a diagnosis.

How are migraine and epilepsy connected?

Research shows that people living with migraine or epilepsy are twice as likely to have the other illness. This suggests there is a connection in how the brain is working in both conditions. In some cases, symptoms of non-typical migraine and epilepsy mimic each other. This can make getting an accurate diagnosis tricky. If you have severe head pain and epilepsy, it may be helpful to ask your doctor if you may have both migraine and epilepsy.

Some studies show that doctors may see epilepsy as a more serious disorder and overlook signs of migraine. An EEG (electroencephalogram) or video EEG can be helpful in correctly diagnosing both conditions. An EEG is a test that detects abnormalities in brain waves, or the electrical activity of your brain.

Head trauma, epilepsy, and migraine

Doctors know that head trauma can cause both epilepsy and migraine. However, they do not fully understand why. One theory is that abnormal electrical activity in the brain, whether caused by head trauma or genetics, can lead to both migraine and epilepsy.¹

Abnormal brain activity is linked to both seizures and cortical spreading depression (CSD). CSD is what causes migraine aura (sensory changes that happen shortly before a migraine attack) and the resulting head pain of migraine. This may be why the two conditions are linked.

There are other ideas for why migraine and epilepsy occur together. One is that repeated migraine attacks lead to epilepsy or vice versa. However, this idea has not been supported by scientific evidence.

Things to consider

If you have epilepsy and get migraine attacks, talk with your doctor. In some cases, people with epilepsy do not report their migraines to their doctor. This is because many epilepsy drugs also help with migraine.

If you get migraines, keep a symptom diary. Be ready to tell your doctor about what the head pain is like and when the attacks occur. This will help your doctor decide if you need more tests or different medicine. More research is needed to better understand the relationship between epilepsy and migraine. For additional information about the connection between migraines and epilepsy, be sure to contact your doctor.

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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