



What is an Ocular Migraine?

An ocular migraine is characterized by temporary vision loss or even temporary blindness. Ocular migraines are thought to be caused by reduced blood flow or spasms of blood vessels behind the eye.

Symptoms

- This includes a small blind spot that affects central vision. This blind spot gets larger, making it impossible for you to drive safely or read. In some cases, the entire visual field may be affected. Generally, the episode lasts less than an hour.
- A flickering blind spot (called a scintillating scotoma) in the center or near the center of your field of view
- A wavy or zigzag ring of colored light surrounding a central blind spot

The symptoms of a visual migraine typically affect both eyes and last 30 minutes or less. A migraine headache may occur shortly after the symptoms of a visual migraine subside (migraine with aura) or visual disturbance may be the only symptom.

What causes ocular and visual migraines?

Ocular migraines are believed to have the same causes as migraine headaches.

Migraine headaches have a genetic basis, and some studies say up to 70 percent of people who suffer from the disorder have a family history of migraine headaches.

Common migraine "triggers" that can cause a susceptible person to have a migraine attack include certain foods, such as aged cheeses, caffeinated drinks, red wine, smoked meats, and chocolate.

Food additives, such as monosodium glutamate (MSG), and artificial sweeteners also can trigger migraines in some individuals.

Other potential migraine triggers include cigarette smoke, perfumes and other odors, glaring or flickering lights, lack of sleep and emotional stress.

Treatment and Prevention

Visual disturbances caused by ocular migraines typically disappear within an hour or less without treatment.

If you are driving or performing other tasks that require good vision when an ocular migraine or visual migraine occurs, stop what you are doing and relax until your vision returns to normal. (If you're driving, pull off to the side of the road as soon as you can safely do so, and wait for the vision disturbances to completely pass.)

If you experience visual disturbances that are accompanied by a migraine headache, see your family physician or a neurologist for evaluation of your migraine episodes.

Your doctor can advise you of the latest medicines for treating migraines, including medicines designed to prevent future attacks. People who experience migraine headaches that last longer than 24 hours or who have more than two migraines per month generally are good candidates for preventive medical treatment.

It's also a good idea to keep a journal of your diet and activities just prior to your ocular migraine or migraine aura episodes to see if you can identify possible triggers that you can avoid in the future. There may be apps to do this.

If your ocular migraines or visual migraines appear to be stress-related, you might be able to reduce the frequency of your migraine attacks without medicine by simply:

- Eating healthful meals on a regular basis
- Drinking lots of fluids
- Avoiding common migraine triggers
- Getting plenty of sleep
- Trying stress-busters such as yoga and massage.