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Managing Migraines

Statistics Canada reports that in 2010/2011, an estimated 8.3% of Canadians (2.7 million) reported that they had been diagnosed with migraine. And this is likely an under estimate of migraine prevalence.

Link to Bell's Palsy

An interesting link has been found between migraine headaches and the incidence of Bell's Palsy. Bell's palsy is a weakness or paralysis of one side of the face; it often comes on quickly and usually resolves over several weeks. It is thought to be related to some kind of nerve damage and has been associated with herpes virus in the past. Now, it's been noted that migraine sufferers have almost double the risk for Bell's Palsy – more investigation required!

Non-Invasive Vagal Stimulation

Migraine sufferers know a special kind of pain. Migraines can come on without warning and with disturbing frequency and treatments fail to manage about half of them. A type of migraine, termed a cluster headache, has shown some promising responses to a treatment called non-invasive vagal stimulation. Previous vagal stimulation procedures involved implanting a permanent device but this new one seems to work without implants. Fingers crossed!

Migraine Prevention?

There is some cautious optimism for a new drug being developed to prevent migraines. The preliminary results are in for the drug, which would be the first in a completely unique category of migraine treatments. So far, it seems safe and effective. The drug is designed to bind with a peptide, making it unable to proceed with the reaction that would produce a migraine. The next step will be phase 3 trials to determine optimal dosing.

Updated Guidelines

The guidelines for managing migraines have been updated recently with emphasis placed on clinical evidence. The choice of treatment relies not just on its effectiveness, but also adverse effects – thus, an effective treatment may not be first choice. Topping the list, the Level A treatments, are: acetaminophen, NSAIDs, triptans, ergot nasal spray or inhaler, butorphanol nasal spray and combinations such as acetaminophen/ASA/caffeine and sumatriptan/naproxen.

Migraines are the third most prevalent and seventh most debilitating condition, worldwide. As a result, many treatments have been tried with varying success. Talk to your pharmacist for information that might help you!