

MIGRAINE AT WORK

Employer Guide

What is migraine?

Migraine is a complex neurological disease, not “just a headache.” Symptoms range from light sensitivity, nausea and vomiting, to temporary paralysis and loss of vision. Severe migraine attacks carry a similar disability weight to that of dementia, quadriplegia, and active psychosis.

Why Should You Care?

Migraine affects 1 in 6 US employees, and is the second leading cause of disability. Untreated migraine can drain productivity, worsen mental health and other comorbidities, and cost the company thousands. Luckily, inexpensive education and accommodation programs can result in over a 500% return on investment, while likely boosting employee satisfaction and retention.

Who Does Migraine Affect?

1 in 6 employees, and disproportionately affects several traditionally marginalized groups including women, people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, and veterans. Migraine is most likely to affect people between the ages of 35-55, coinciding with prime earning years.

How Much Does Migraine Cost?

For every 1,000 employees, each U.S. company spends \$84,000 in direct costs and absenteeism, according to the Integrated Benefits Institute, an independent industry productivity group.

What are common migraine triggers in the workplace?

- Bright, flickering, non-adjustable lighting
- Strong odors, such as perfumes or cleaning supplies
- Excessive or repetitive noises
- Computer screen glare
- Rigid schedules and deadlines

What accommodations may be effective for migraine in the workplace?

Flexible scheduling and remote work options
Sensory friendly room, like those commonly used for nursing parents
Scent-free workplace policies
Adjustable lighting options, including natural light and curtains
Anti-glare screen filters

How does migraine tie into mental health?

Migraine is not a mental health disorder. Migraine is a complex neurological disease. However, the relationship between migraine and mental health is complex and likely bidirectional. People with migraine have 5x the rates of anxiety, 2-3x the rates of depression, 2.5-3x the rates of bipolar disorder, and 2.5x the rates of suicide than the general population. Research shows that properly treating migraine may help reduce the impact of mental health comorbidities.

Why is migraine in the workplace hidden?

Migraine is a highly stigmatized condition. Only 22% of employers think migraine attacks are a “serious enough” issue to call out sick for work. When calling in sick for a migraine attack, only 42% of people “admit” that this is the real reason.

A majority of the symptoms of migraine are invisible, so others are frequently unable to know that someone is in the middle of an attack.

Many of the medications used to treat migraine were designed to treat other conditions like blood pressure, epilepsy, and depression so the medical claims data will not accurately reflect the true prevalence of migraine. In addition, 40% of those with migraine are undiagnosed and may be using over the counter medications used to treat pain or sinus congestion.

What Can Be Done?

Migraine at Work offers a wide range of turnkey solutions to managing migraine in the workplace. From offering surveys to determine the prevalence and cost of migraine in your office to seminars to twelve week educational courses, we will work with you to come up with a tailored plan. Reach out today to Dean Barclay at dean@migraineatwork.org



For more information and resources contact Kellie Pokrifka at kellie@migraineatwork.org
or visit migraineatwork.org