

PRESS RELEASE

NEW SURVEY REVEALS ALMOST 1 IN 4 PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED SUICIDAL FEELINGS OR HAVE SELF HARMED LINKED TO THEIR MIGRAINE/HEADACHE CONDITION

London, 12 August, 2019: Migraines/ headache conditions may have a direct impact on a person's mental health. 84% of migraine sufferers say that their migraines affect their mental health (compared to 25% of the UK population that experience a mental health problem). Migraine is a neurological disease, which is often not taken seriously and hugely under appreciated. These are some of the alarming findings from a new survey, carried out on 1,734 migraine and headache sufferers, by the National Migraine Centre, the only UK charity that treats migraine and headaches.

- 24% have experienced suicidal feelings or have self-harmed linked to their migraine/headache condition.
- 22% of those that have experienced suicidal feelings or have self-harmed do so more than once a week due to their migraine/headache condition.
- 65% of respondents answered that they have experienced depression linked to their migraines and/or headaches.
- 1 in 8 people who do experience depression due to their migraine and/or headaches feel this way every day.
- 48% have experienced loneliness linked to their migraines and/or headaches.
- 1 in 8 people who do experience loneliness and/or isolation feel this way every day because of their migraine/headache condition.

The survey was carried out to help highlight and understand the issues of migraine sufferers and their mental health. The research was anonymous and was conducted by the National Migraine Centre over a two-month period from April – May 2019.

Dr Katy Munro of the National Migraine Centre says: "The impact of migraine especially chronic migraine, leads to patients struggling through the days and this frequently causes them problems of depression and also anxiety. As our survey also highlights loneliness and isolation features strongly and some sufferers even feel suicidal. We recognise the impact on their families and friends too, as they try to support migraine sufferers through their disabling and debilitating attacks. We hope to raise awareness of this aspect of migraine throughout Migraine Awareness Week."

More than 23% of people suffer from migraines in the UK, according to The Work Foundation report 'Society's headache'. Migraine can cause not only head pain, but nausea, vomiting, dizziness, visual disturbances, loss of speech, vertigo, confusion, and sensitivity to light, smells, movement, sounds and touch.

David Bloomfield, CEO of the National Migraine Centre, explains: "It is heart breaking to regularly meet people at our Centre, especially young people, who are already becoming social outcasts, losing friends and struggling with their education or career. These shocking figures from our survey serve as a timely reminder that much work remains to be done before migraine and its affect on a person's mental wellbeing is fully understood."

Vicki Nash, Head of Policy and Campaigns at Mind, the mental health charity, said: "Mental health and physical health problems are often related but too often they are treated separately. Living with migraines, especially if you are regularly in pain, can take its toll on a person's mental health, and it is understandable that being diagnosed and living with them will have an impact on someone's mental wellbeing."

"Health professionals should treat each person as a whole and, if supporting someone with a health problem like migraines, offer support for their mental health as well. Starting the conversation means that the person is more likely to recognise the impact of their condition on their mental wellbeing and seek help if they need it.

"If you're worried about your mental health, it's worth talking to someone you trust, such as a close friend or family member. You should also talk to your GP about the treatment that might be available. Appointments are short, but it's important that you and your doctor talk about your health as a whole – treating mental and physical health together will help us to get the support we need to stay well.

"It can be daunting having a conversation about your feelings with your GP. Our 'Find the Words' guide has tips on how to prepare beforehand – see www.mind.org.uk/findthewords or call our Infoline on 0300 123 3393 for more information about your physical and mental health."

Other key findings identified in the National Migraine Centre's first migraine and mental health survey:

- 85% of respondents experienced fatigue linked to their migraine/ headache condition.
- 73% of respondents experienced mood changes linked to their migraine/ headache condition.

For help and further information, call the National Migraine Centre on 020 7251 3322 or visit www.nationalmigrainecentre.org.uk.

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MEDIA ENQUIRIES: contact Charlotte Burr or Swati Raina on Tel: 020 7251 7806. Email: charlotte.burr@nationalmigrainecentre.org.uk. Headache Specialist Doctors and David Bloomfield, CEO of the National Migraine Centre, are available for interviews. Patient case studies are also available for interviews.

Notes to editors:

- National Migraine Centre is the only national charity that provides treatment for migraine and headache sufferers. It was founded in 1980 by two neurologists and has treated more than 60,000 patients. In addition to this the National Migraine Centre is committed to advocating their cause and educating healthcare professionals. Migraine sufferers can self-refer to see a headache specialist doctor at the centre. Visit our website: www.nationalmigrainecentre.org.uk
- A Canadian study found that people with migraines were 77% more likely to have attempted suicide in comparison to those without migraines (Esme Fuller-Thomson and Gwyneth A. Hodgins: Archives of Suicide Research 2019).
- Findings have shown that there is a 'bidirectional relationship between migraine and depression, with one disorder increasing the risk for the other and vice versa, suggesting shared biological mechanisms' (Yang, Ligthart, Terwindt, Boomsma, Rodriguez-Acevedo, Nyholt, Genetic epidemiology of migraine and depression, 2016).
- A total of 1,734 people participated in the national patient survey.
- 89% of respondents were female and the remaining 11% male.
- 50% of respondents suffers from episodic migraine (0-14 pain days in a month), 39% have chronic migraine (more than 15 pain days in a month), 11% had other headache types.
- 27% of respondents were aged 45-54, 23% were aged 55- 64, 21% were aged 35-44, 13% were aged 25-34, 12% were aged 65+, 3% were aged 18-24 and the remaining 1% were under 18.

Six tips to help manage migraines and mental health:

1. Mindfulness- there is good evidence that mindfulness can be useful in the pain phase of migraine as well as helping to manage anxiety and depression. Guided apps can be used like 'Calm' or 'Breathing Zone'.
2. Exercise- exercise can be good for anxiety and depression and can help migraine. Exercise has been shown to be more beneficial in mild to moderate anxiety and depression than antidepressants, but it can also be beneficial for migraine management too. Light cardio exercise kicks in endorphins, improves the neurochemical balance in your brain and prevents a stress 'let down' headache after a busy day. Ensure you have drunk enough water and eaten at least an hour before to avoid triggering an attack.
3. Expressive writing- there is good evidence that expressive writing can be used for chronic pain. On three consecutive days a week sit down and write whatever comes into your head for 30 minutes and then throw it away without reading it.
4. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)- if migraine is causing anxiety or depression, CBT can provide methods of coping with both the migraine symptoms and the symptoms of concurrent mental health issues.
5. Sleep- good quality and sufficient quantity of sleep are vital for maintaining good mental health. Sleep routine is particularly important for migraine- shifts of up to an hour either way can trigger attacks. Avoiding using electronic equipment, at least an hour before bed can help with sleep quality.
6. Caffeine- too much caffeine can trigger migraine and also worsens any anxiety symptoms people have. If migraine and anxiety are problems, think about going caffeine free.