

DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Cluster Headache Disorder

Cluster headache is a disorder that causes a series of short and painful headaches every day for days and weeks at a time. The first step to getting vital treatment is being able to understand the disorder and to talk to your doctor about concerns, treatment options, and more. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Corticosteroids	Corticosteroids are given to treat cluster headaches because they are fast-acting. They are given with other treatments to help break the headache cycle.
Deep Brain Stimulation	This is a type of surgical procedure for treating cluster headache. It involves placing an electrode deep into the brain to target parts of the pain in order to reduce the symptoms and incidences of cluster headache.
Episodic Cluster Headache	Most people have episodic cluster headaches, where they have a cluster headache that lasts one week to a year, followed by a period of pain-free remission that can last up to 12 months.
Hypothalamus	Cluster headaches appear to be triggered by the hypothalamus, the part of the brain responsible for sleep and wake cycles. Imaging studies during a cluster attack have actually shown activation of the hypothalamus.
Neuromodulation	Whether electrical and magnetic, neuromodulation employs the body's natural biological responses by stimulating nerve cell activity to control pain receptors in the brain. Many FDA approved non-invasive neuromodulation devices can be effective at inducing long periods of remission from cluster headaches.
Occipital Nerve Block	This is an injection mix of anesthesia and steroids. This temporary treatment can stop cluster headaches as they start in the occipital nerves, the group of nerves located at the base of the skull.
Occipital Nerve Stimulation	This procedure involves surgical implantation of a device that sends electrical impulses to the occipital nerves. It can be a viable treatment for people who have failed to respond to medicinal options.
Remission Periods	Remission periods are periods of relief from cluster headache that generally last months or years. People with chronic cluster headache have no remission periods or very short remission periods of less than a month at a time.
Trigeminal Nerve	The trigeminal nerve is the main sensory nerve located in the face. When activated, it leads to eye pain related to cluster headaches.



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about managing cluster headache disorder.

About Symptoms

- What are the signs of an oncoming cluster headache?
- If my symptoms worsen, what should I do on my own?
- When should I contact you?
- What should I do when I feel a headache beginning?
- Are nausea and vomiting symptoms of cluster headaches?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- What are my risk factors for cluster headaches?
- What do you think is causing my headaches?
- Is there more than one condition causing my headaches?

About Diagnosis

- What tests will you use to diagnose my headaches?
- How accurate is testing?
- What do the results mean?
- How safe is testing?
- Now that I have been diagnosed, what is my next step?
- Should I see a specialist?
- What is my long-term prognosis?

About Treatment

- What are my treatment options?
- What happens if one treatment doesn't help?
- How effective is each treatment?
- What results can I expect from treatment and how long will it take for treatments to work?
- What side effects should I look out for?
