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RE: Understanding Migraine Disease and Migraineurs

If you're reading this, someone close to you is a Migraineur, someone diagnosed with Migraine, a genetic neurological **disease**. Migraine is one of the most misunderstood, underdiagnosed and undertreated of all diseases. Unless you've experienced the pain and other debilitating symptoms of Migraine yourself, it is very difficult to comprehend. It is not an exaggeration to say that some people have committed suicide to escape the pain. In addition to the extreme head pain, Migraine can be accompanied by other symptoms including nausea, vomiting, dizziness, extreme sensitivity to light and sound, temporary loss of vision, inability to concentrate, difficulty in speaking/finding the right words, depression, panic attacks, and far more. The slightest movement can cause such pain that Migraineurs have described it as "an ice pick in my eye," "my head breaking into pieces," and "my brain exploding." To put it plainly, Migraine can be absolutely devastating.

Here are some basics about Migraine Disease that you should know:

- Based on the most recent U.S. census statistics, Migraine disease affects more than 37 million people in the United States alone.
- Migraines are **NOT** headaches. Migraine is a **genetic neurological disease**, similar in some ways to Epilepsy. The head pain of a Migraine attack is only one symptom of an episode of Migraine disease, just as a seizure is only one symptom of an episode of Epilepsy.
- Migraine disease is **NOT** a psychological disorder. The disease and all its symptoms are neurological in origin and very, very real. Migraineurs are not neurotic, lazy, "high-strung," overly emotional, or faking. They are in very real pain and physical distress.
- Not all doctors have the experience and knowledge to properly treat Migraine. Finding a doctor to properly treat Migraine is one of the most important, and sometimes most difficult, steps in treatment.
- There is **NO CURE** for Migraine. Most Migraineurs, with the help of a qualified doctor, can find preventive regimens that will prevent many, but not all, Migraine attacks.
- Migraine abortive medications such as Imitrex, Zomig, Maxalt, Amerge, Axert, DHE, and Migranal, do not work for all Migraineurs. It is sometimes very difficult to find medications that will relieve the pain and other symptoms of a Migraine attack.
- **Migraine attacks can be dangerous.** If the pain of an attack lasts more than 72 hours with less than four pain-free hours while awake, it is termed Status Migrainosus, and puts the sufferer at increased risk for stroke. **A Migraineur in Status Migrainosus needs immediate medical attention.**
- **A Migraine attack can, in rare cases, actually be fatal.** An otherwise healthy 21-year-old member of our community died of a Migrainous Stroke in November, 2001.
- Migraine disease can be **disabling** for some Migraineurs to the extent that they qualify for disability income or qualify for the Americans with Disability Act provisions. There are many whose disease is so severe that doctors are unable to control the attacks, and the Migraineur is unable to work or participate in "normal" daily activities. **When a Migraine attack strikes, most Migraineurs desperately need a dark, quiet place to lie down.**

- Migraine attacks can be triggered by many things:
 - **Perfumes and fragrances** from other sources are a very common Migraine trigger. If you live or work with a Migraineur, please refrain from wearing fragrances around them.
 - **Bright and/or flickering lights**, especially fluorescent lighting -- some Migraineurs need to wear sunglasses, even inside.
 - Many **foods** can be triggers, especially foods prepared with MSG.
 - Loud noises and crowded places can also be triggers.
 - **Changes in weather** are triggers for many Migraineurs.
 - Cigarette smoke, exhaust fumes
 - **Each Migraineur's triggers vary**. There are many other potential triggers. This list is just a beginning.
 - **Stress** is **NOT** a Migraine trigger. It is what is called an exacerbating factor that makes Migraineurs more susceptible to their triggers just as stress makes anyone more susceptible to the virus that brings on the common cold.

The Migraineur(s) in your life need your help and understanding. They need you to realize that they cannot help being ill, they are not "having headaches for attention," and they are sometimes unable to care for themselves. If they need medical attention, they need someone to take them and be with them. As well as being extremely painful physically, Migraine can be devastating emotionally and to relationships and careers. Since the disease is so misunderstood, Migraineurs often feel alone, isolated, and desolate. They also often feel guilty because they are not able to "be there" for their family and friends as much as they want to be and because they may have to miss days of work. The Migraineur(s) you know need not only your help with getting their medicines and any medical care they may need; they need your moral support every bit as badly. A good, solid support system is as important to Migraineurs as their health care teams. **YOU** are very important to them. That's why it's important that you understand Migraine.

If you have any questions or need more information, please email me at teri@helpforheadaches.com.

Sincerely,



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