

Migraines in the middle of the night

by Lev Raphael

Do you have a migraine in the middle of the night? Some people get irritable; others, like Lev Raphael, try to negotiate their way out of them.



"I feel a migraine coming on in the middle of the night." | Photo Credit ©Artem / Adobe Stock

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"I feel a migraine coming on in the middle of the night."

Night Moves. It's 3 a.m., and I'm wide awake despite a heavy dose of Trazodone, which usually keeps me asleep most nights. My spouse is breathing softly on the other side of the bed in our room with light-blocking shades. Ditto our two Westies huddled together in the middle of the bed like litter mates. They stir briefly when I wake up, but since I'm quiet, they just sigh and fall more deeply asleep.

I almost feel like an intruder on their privacy, but the real night time intruder is my migraine. At least, I think that's what it is. I have the familiar pressure over and behind my left eye, and I do a slow checklist. Nausea? No. Dizziness? No. Light sensitivity—well, that one doesn't apply in this situation. Possible sinus headache? No. The pain is just on one side. So even though it woke me up, it's not severe. Yet.

I have become familiar with migraines in the middle of the night. My migraines are chronic and have been with me for twenty years through different treatments and medications. Some months are better than others, and it's rarer and rarer that I have to go to bed during the day and try to sleep it off or at least sleep through it. Even so, migraines in the middle of the night disable me. It's hard to read a book, look at any kind of screen, or edit a client's writing. I don't want to talk to anyone or drive when I'm in the grip of a migraine. I feel hemmed in, clouded, almost bewitched.

Pre-pandemic, I wouldn't go to our palatial health club, where I had many old friends and always made time to chat. I also had to cancel lunches with friends and any kind of travel in-state or out-of-state. In the midst of a migraine, I don't even want to play tug of war with our younger Westie, who may be five years old but still acts like a puppy and needs active playtime in the evening on top of however many walks we can do during the day. He's feisty but sensitive: When a migraine knocks me out, and I go back to bed, he'll jump on and try to lick my face or just lie down next to me, clearly tuned in to my distress.


Can you inherit nighttime migraines?

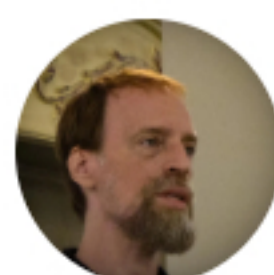
Sometimes I wonder if I could possibly have inherited this chronic burden of migraines from my mother, who used to complain about headaches but never saw a doctor about them. She just descended into her deeper-than-usual depression, and I knew not to annoy her because she might blow up.

Me, I tend to be calm when visited by a migraine because they're so familiar. I alert my spouse: "Don't expect much of me today—and if I get tense, it's not anything about you." That's a familiar warning and helps me feel connected. I don't want to withdraw completely, but I need some cushioning and protection.

Continuing my 3AM checklist, I realize I'm in the familiar territory of migraines in the middle of the night: the temperature has dropped this week into the single digits, and weather changes of almost any kind can bring on a migraine. I feel lucky that the migraine didn't come sooner and isn't worse. And grateful that I have a special escape from what's happening to me: I can write about it.

So I do. I slip off quietly to my study, open up Word, and feel free.

 It is the middle of the night and my migraine is killing me.



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Lev Raphael, the author of "Migraines in the middle of the night," has written 27 books in genres from memoir to mystery. Lev Raphael has dreamed about being a writer since he fell in love with storytelling in second grade. He coaches, mentors, and edits writers at <https://writewithoutborders.com/>