

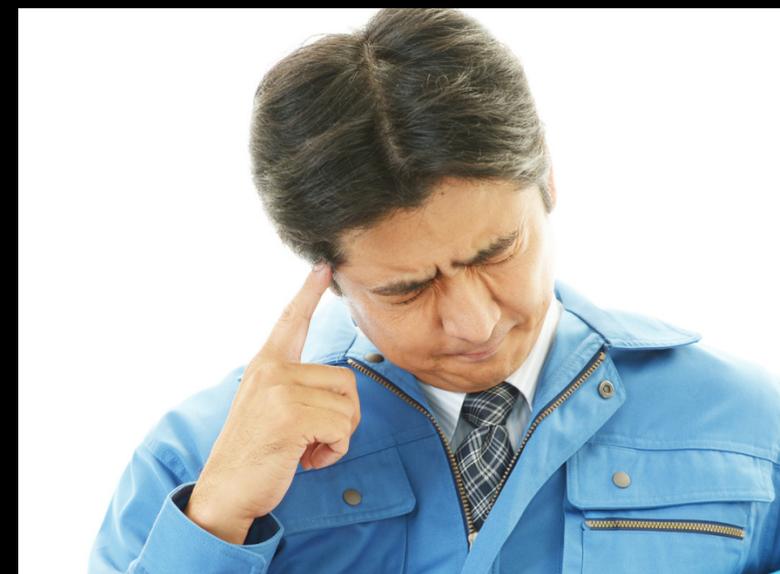


Galen Centre
for Health and Social Policy



Silent Pain

Migraine In The Workplace for Employers, Human Resource,
And Occupational Safety and Health Professionals



A GUIDEBOOK



This guidebook will provide you with general information, practical advice and guidance on how to address migraine challenges within the workplace setting.

Aim of this guide

This guide on the management of migraine in the workplace is aimed at employers and human resource professionals from both SME's and large businesses. Migraine is a common condition in people of working age.

By supporting employees with migraine to perform at work, organizations retain valuable experience and knowledge and boost productivity. Helping the employee to manage migraine better may also reduce healthcare costs and sickness absence.

Acknowledgements

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This publication is not a substitute for detailed advice of an individual's particular rights and circumstances from medical, occupational safety and health, and human resource professionals.

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Approximately **3.9 million individuals** or **12%** of the population estimated to live with migraine in Malaysia.¹

Individuals lost **17 workdays every year** due to migraine-related absenteeism.²

Migraine at work

What is migraine?



Migraine is a very common and relatively invisible cause of potential disability and suffering.

It is the **3rd most common disabling condition** in the world.³



It disproportionately and dramatically impacts women of working age, affecting roughly **one in five women** in their lives.⁴



Migraine is complex and treatments differ from person to person.

There is **no cure**, but reducing severity, frequency, improving responsiveness of painkillers are possible.



Symptoms may include sensitivity to light, sound and smells, feeling nauseous and vomiting.

Common workplace triggers⁵

- Stress
- Lack of exercise
- Loud or repetitive noise
- Dehydration
- Bright lights
- Caffeine and alcohol
- Not enough sleep
- Strong odors
- Screen glare

¹ GBD 2016 Headache Collaborators (2018). Global, regional, and national burden of migraine and tension-type headache, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016. *Lancet Neurology* 2018; 17:954–76

² Wong, L. et al. (2020) Impact of migraine on workplace productivity and monetary loss: a study of employees in banking sector in Malaysia. *J Headache Pain* 21, 68

³ Migraine Trust. (2018). Migraine: Help at work. Retrieved July 2020.

⁴ World Health Organization (2011). Atlas of headache disorders and resources in the world. Retrieved June 2020.

Making workplaces migraine-friendly⁶

- Limit noise levels and provide adjustable lighting
- Install anti-glare filters on computer & TV screens
- Promote a fragrance-free environment and consider alternative cleaning detergents (limit scents & odors)
- Set aside a quiet space for employees to use should they experience a migraine attack
- Consider a flexible schedule for employees experiencing migraine such as work from home



- Time off for medical appointments
- Setting realistic and reasonable expectations and key performance indicators (KPIs)

Lack of awareness and knowledge among employers often leads to unintended stigma in the workplace.

Because of this stigma, those living with migraine often do their best to hide their situation in the workplace, which leads to under-reporting and going untreated.

With the right information and support, most people with migraine are able to manage their condition and work effectively.



⁵ The Walton Centre. NHS Foundation Trust (2018). Migraine a comprehensive guide. Retrieved May 2020.

⁶ Business Disability Forum (2014). Factsheet for Employers on Migraines. <http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk>

Guiding Principles

Communication and disclosure

The approach taken should not be stigmatising. Due to possible impact on job security or career progression, some employees may not wish to disclose their condition or ask for support.

Safe and open communication channels must be in place for disclosure to happen.

Confidentiality

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The right of staff to privacy and confidentiality applies to migraine and any other health conditions. Personal information should not be disclosed to a third party without their consent.

Perceived lack of confidentiality is a challenge to implementing workplace health policies.

Building supportive work cultures

All staff including management and employees play a role in creating a healthy workplace, and should feel supported to speak openly about their health and wellbeing needs. Meaningful participation and engagement of leadership is essential for workplace health approaches to succeed.

Awareness and education on migraine help employees to cope in a supportive environment of colleagues and managers.

Equal Opportunity

To be inclusive at work, employees need to be empowered of how they want to work and where they want to work.

Micromanagement should be reduced at all levels. Equally important, they need to be provided with equal opportunity to the accessibility for resources and information to perform at work. This can support employees to reduce the work stress leading to migraine.

Organisations that implement policies on reasonable accommodations and inclusive HR practices will optimize productivity and retain talent.

Migraine in the Workplace

1.1 The right to safe and healthy workplaces

Migraine is a leading cause of disability worldwide for individuals below the age of 50 years old, which means it is likely to affect the economically active in employment.⁵

Employers have the obligation to ensure the safety, care, and welfare of all their employees in the work place, as stipulated in the Occupation Safety and Health Act 1994, including the provision and maintenance of a working environment that is safe and free from health risks.⁸

In the modern workplace, healthy workplaces lead to greater productivity, competitiveness and sustainability.

Employers have a duty of care to ensure workers are treated equally and fairly.

The impact of migraine on the workplace presents a serious issue for employers as well as the individual employee.

The annual cost of unhealthy workplaces: RM 1.46 million per employer.⁹

Sickness absence policies should be developed so that people with long term health conditions, such as migraine are not put at a disadvantage.

Failure to support employees can be costly, leading to problems with retention. poor morale and reduced productivity.

3.9 million individuals or 12% of the Malaysian population estimated to have migraine.¹

More common in those aged 30 to 45.



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PREVENTING & MANAGING MIGRAINE IN THE WORKPLACE

⁸ Laws of Malaysia. Occupational Safety And Health Act 1994. Act 514 (1994)

⁹ AIA (2019). Malaysia's Healthiest Workplaces 2019. AIA Vitality. <https://healthiestworkplace.aia.com/malaysia>. Retrieved June 2020.

Migraine in the Workplace

Ethical considerations

People with migraine have the right to workplaces free of discrimination, whether during recruitment or during employment.

A higher level of awareness and education will help reduce stigma.

Supportive and inclusive workplaces are increasingly relevant to talent retention and employee well-being.

Employers monitor and manage acute or short-term sickness which can often be disruptive, increase pressure on the workforce, and affect workflow and deliverables.

1.2 Business case for addressing migraine

Lost productivity accounts for the vast majority of migraine cost.

In Singapore, absence from work and presenteeism due to migraine accounted for over 80% of economic costs incurred among full time employees, amounting to over SGD 800 million.¹⁰ Similarly, in the United Kingdom, indirect costs contributed to around 90% of the total economic burden.³

Employees with migraine often **suffer alone** due to the common perception that it is similar to tension-type headaches.

Taking **medical leave may be seen unfavorably by colleagues or managers.** Hence the employee may choose to continue working despite being affected by symptoms, leading to presenteeism.

Presenteeism or working while sick, is common among people living with migraines. They fear **social judgement** about their illness.¹¹

A person may even attend work while having a migraine attack due to fear of facing a disciplinary hearing or some form of financial penalty.

She or he could be concerned about being seen as unreliable or faking it.

Workplaces are key places where migraine-friendly policies should be enacted to reduce the impact on performance and productivity. Strategies implemented are thus a long-term investment rather than a cost to the organisation.

Promoting good health and well-being among employees **increases the value** of an organisation. It has a positive impact on **increasing and sustaining productivity.**

Failing to invest in structures which help retain staff with long-term health conditions leads to significant costs not only in morale and productivity, but also losses in training and institutional capacity.

The annual cost of unhealthy workplaces

RM 1.46 million per employer⁹

¹⁰ Jonathan Jia Yuan Ong, et. al. (2020). Economic burden of migraine in Singapore. Cephalalgia Reports Volume 3:1-11

¹¹ Peggy A. Berry (2007). Migraine Disorder: Workplace Implications and Solutions. AAOHN Journal March 2007. Retrieved June 2020

Understanding Migraine

Fact 1: Migraine is disabling

Migraine is a neurological disorder broadly classified into migraines with auras and those without, as well as whether they are episodic or recurrent attacks (Table 1).

Migraine can strike at any time of the working day and can be potentially debilitating.

More than 90% of people with migraine are unable to work or function normally during their migraine.

Migraine and severe headaches are the second leading cause of presenteeism in the workplace.

Having a migraine without aura, is 5 times more common than migraine with aura.¹²

The MIDAS (Migraine Disability Assessment) questionnaire is used to measure the impact of migraines, and allows for determination of pain intensity and disability level.³

MIDAS Grades I - IV indicates little or no disability to severe disability.

Patients with Grade I or Grade II migraine typically require only over-the-counter analgesics to reduce migraine disability.

Grade III or IV require migraine-specific treatments.



Migraine without aura	Migraine with aura
<p>Also known as common migraine.</p> <p>Pulsating pain of moderate to severe intensity lasting hours to days on one side of the head.</p> <p>Accompanied by nausea or vomiting, sensitivity to light, strong smells and noises.</p>	<p>Visual, sensory, speech disturbances (aura symptoms) develop gradually lasting up to 60 minutes. Motor symptoms can last up to 72 hours.</p> <p>Often followed by headache and other migraine symptoms.</p>

Migraines without aura, and with aura, can be episodic or chronic

Episodic
Occurs 0 to 14 days/ month

Chronic
Headache attacks ≥ 15 days/month for more than 3 months of which ≥ 8 days are migraine headaches.

Table 1. Types of migraine (International Headache Society classification)¹³

¹² Ministry of Health. MyHEALTH Portal. Migraine. Retrieved June 2020.

¹³ International Headache Society (2018). International Classification of Headache Disorders (ICHD) (3rd Edition). Retrieved May 2020

Understanding Migraine

Fact 2: Not just a headache

In general, there are four phases of a migraine and headache pain consists of only one of these phases.

Each individual experiences migraine differently. Some may get a few attacks a year, while others as frequently as a few times a week.

People may have different or a combination of symptoms in different attacks.

Migraine headaches typically last between 4 to 72 hours.

Symptoms such as light and sound sensitivity, and feeling nauseous may cease in between attacks, allowing for employees to be able to return to work.

The complex nature of migraine means that the treatments available are varied and differ from person to person.

Though there is currently no cure for migraine, there is effective treatment.⁵

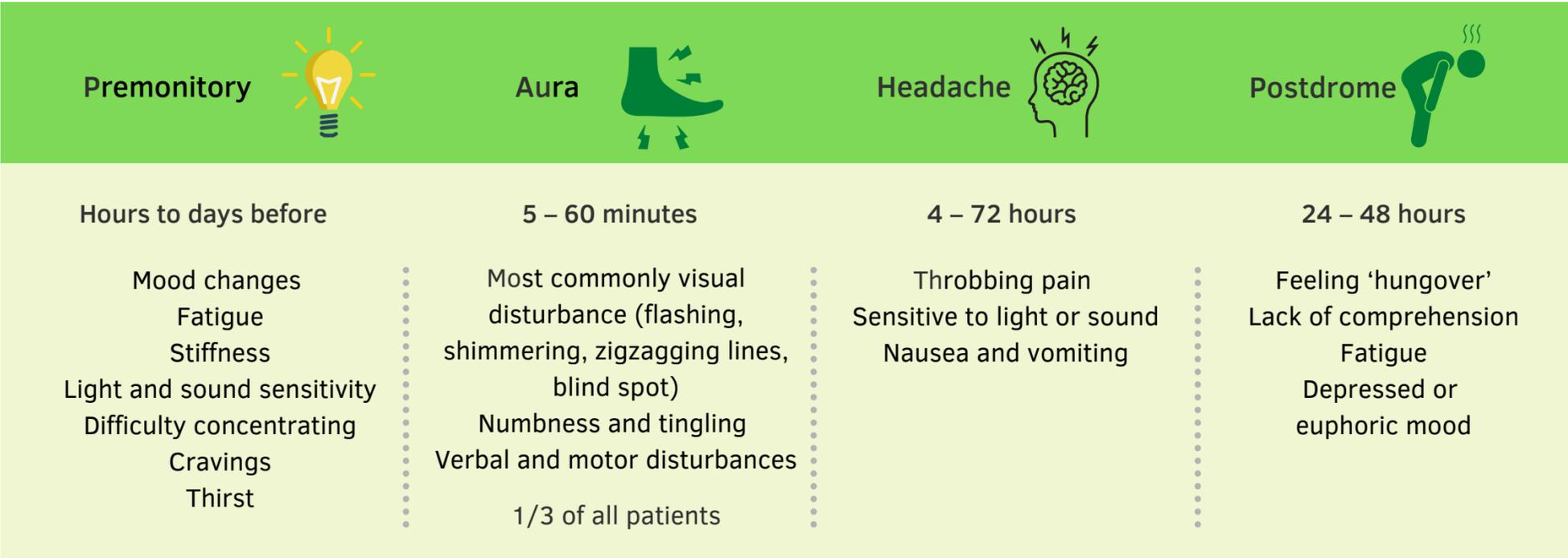
Measuring migraine severity¹⁴

There is no objective measure of migraine severity in individual patients and this may add to stigmatisation of this condition.

Yes, migraine is a medical condition

- Neurobiological pain and headache disorder.
- Caused by hypersensitive trigeminovascular system
- Leading cause of disability and financial burden^{5, 14}
- The appropriate reference for treatment: a neurologist

Migraine phases



¹⁴ House of Commons, UK Parliament (2010) Headache Disorders – not respected, not resourced. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Primary Headache Disorders.

Diagram 1. Phases of migraine

Understanding Migraine

Fact 3: Migraine can be managed

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Warning signs of when to seek for medical help

- Stiff neck
- Fever
- Numbness or weakness in the limbs
- Difficulty speaking coherently
- More intense or different than previous attacks
- Vomiting

A range of treatment options exists for migraine which should be decided with a doctor or other healthcare professional.

As it is commonly under-diagnosed and under-treated, some people with migraine may not be on optimal medical management.

Acute treatment is most common, including migraine-specific medications that must be taken within one hour of the onset of headache.

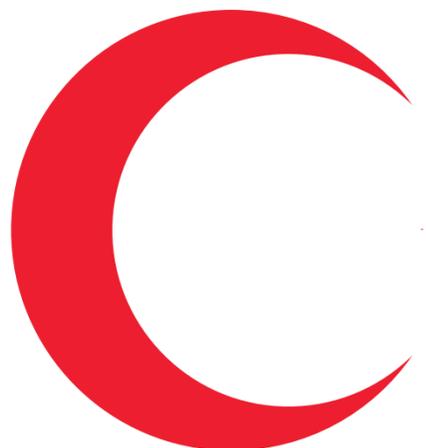
To avoid medication overuse, there is a limit on the number of times acute treatment should be taken in a month. Resting in a quiet, dark room will often be necessary and sleep can be therapeutic.

Preventive treatment may be prescribed to be on a regular basis to reduce frequency of attacks.

Lifestyle and behaviour modification is also important, including avoidance of triggers, regular sleep schedule, healthy eating, limiting alcohol and caffeine intake, relaxation and stress management.

In general, the minimal provisions for first aid care in workplaces are below:

- The availability of a cool, dark room for the employee to rest/lie down
- Cool compress or ice pack
- Over-the-counter analgesic such as paracetamol or ibuprofen
- Emergency hotline numbers and contacts



An employee-centred approach (5Rs)¹⁵

- Educate employees about health policies and available support
- Regularly collect and review information about health risks in the workplace (e.g. too much workload and poor working conditions such as poor ventilation and lighting)
- Establish clear responsibility and accountability roles for the development and maintenance of a healthy workplace

- Build supportive workplace environments which seek perspectives and advice from employees
- Accept change
- Trust your employees' judgement
- Keep a long-term perspective
- Use problem solving and reasoning to work through the issue rather than ignoring them, detaching yourself from them, or wishing that they would go away.
- Take care of your greatest assets, your staff

- Communicate about migraine across the organization to reduce fear, stigma, and discrimination
- Cultivate a healthy workplace culture that is conducive to supporting employees' health
- Promote accessibility in the workplace by accommodating changes
- Train managers how to identify migraine, and on available employee tools and supports
- Lead by example

- Recovery from migraine is an individualized process and is person-centered, not illness-centered.
- Having a good understanding of migraine helps in recovery
- Recovery can occur, even if migraine symptoms are present
- Recovery is not a linear process and has occasional setbacks and learning from experience
- People differ in the way they recover from migraine
- Stigma can slow the recovery process

- Ask employees what they need. They will know what they are capable of and what they need to succeed in the workplace.
- Set realistic goals and expectations based on the needs of the workplace and your employee's abilities
- Lead by example. Show that as an employer, you value, trust, and respect the employee who is returning to the workplace.

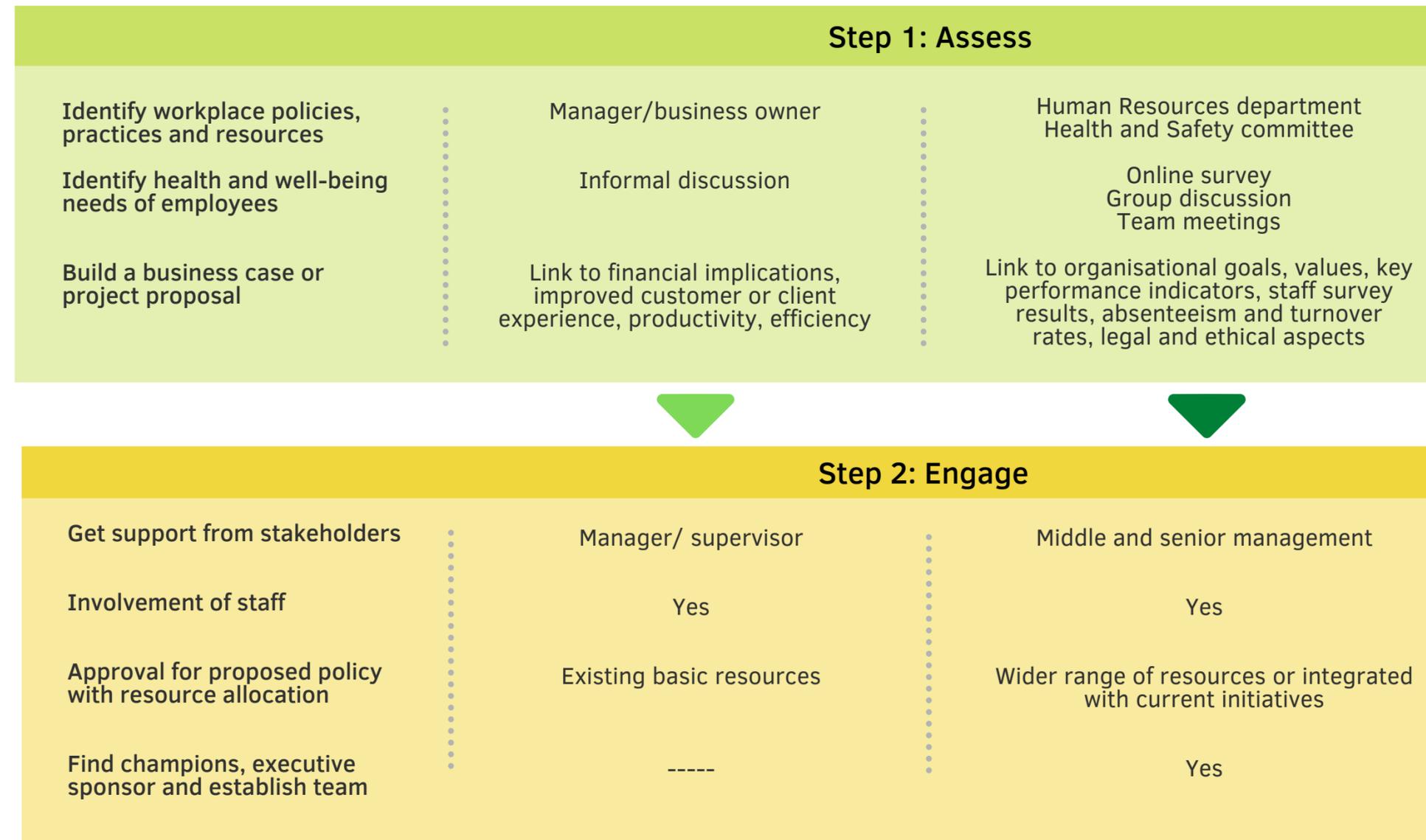


¹⁵ Modified from 5Rs of Workplace Mental Health, Mental Health Commission, Government of Canada

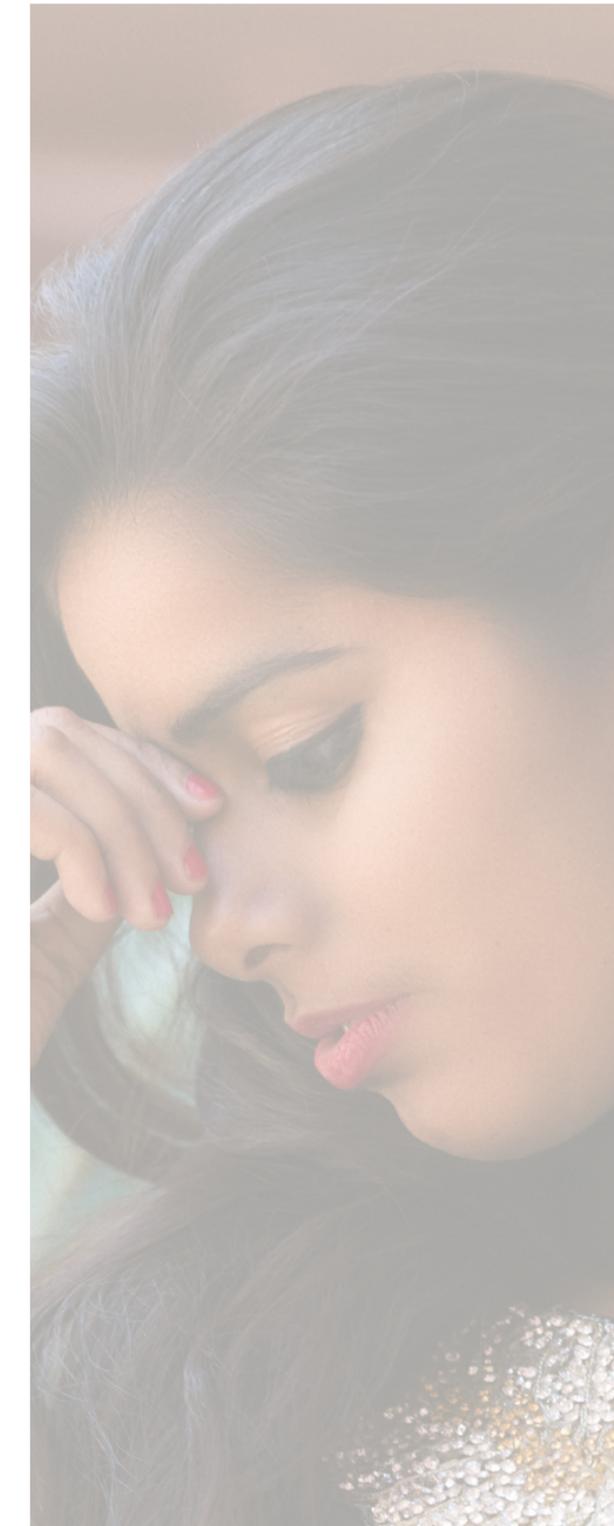
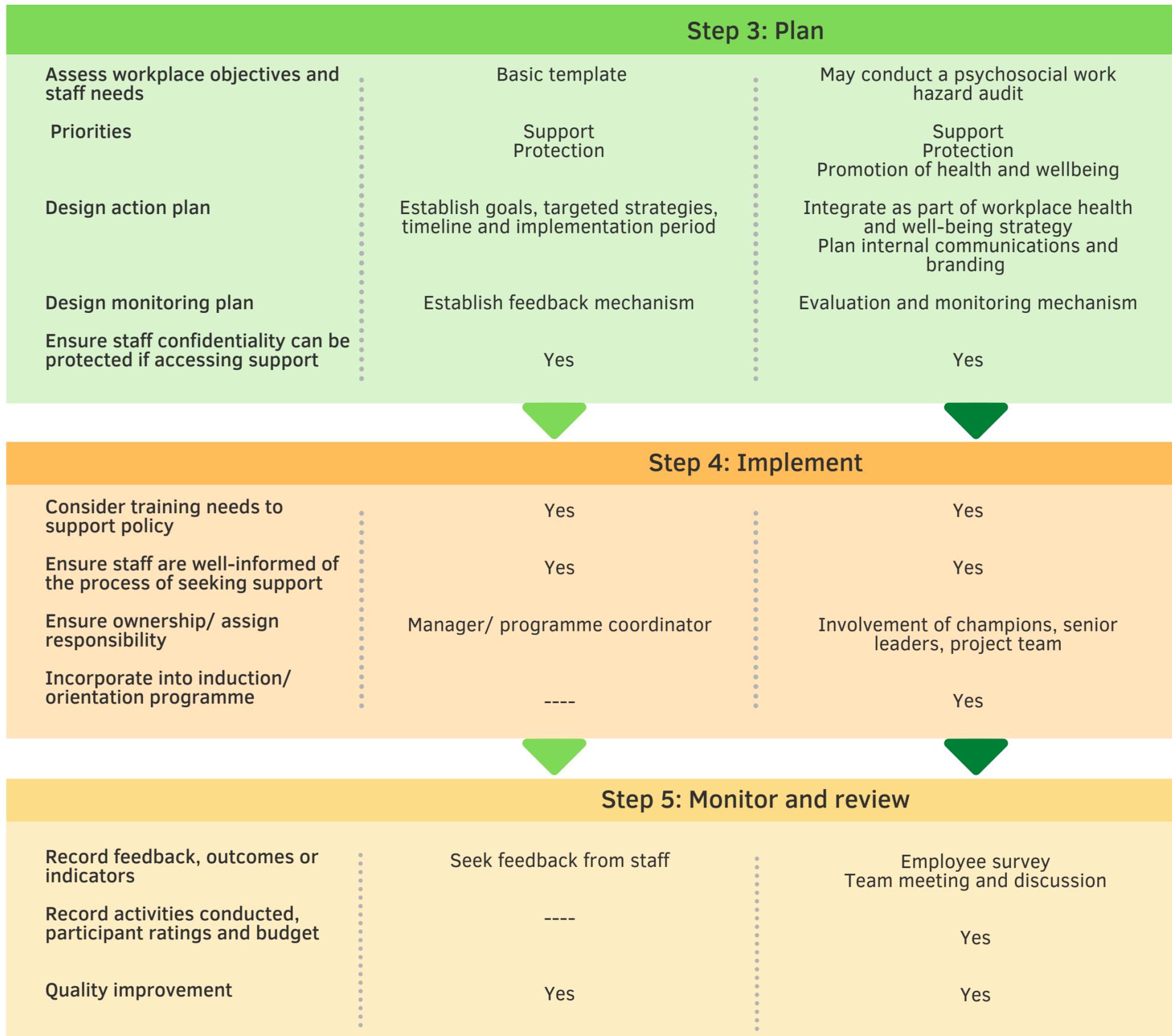
Building Migraine-Friendly Workplaces¹⁶

SME
(small, medium enterprise)

Large enterprise



¹⁶ Based on the Generalist Intervention Model (GIM) of planned organisational change. <https://mswcareers.com/generalistinterventionmodel/>. Retrieved June 2020



Good practice for employers

As an employer, what can you do when an employee is missing work due to migraines? Employees with migraines should have the same protection that an employee with another major illness or disability would have.

It is important for employers to do what they can to reasonably accommodate, and to reduce migraine triggers in the workplace and keep employees happy, working and healthy.

Employers are taking on more than just the costs of medical treatments for employees suffering from migraine symptoms, **the time lost at work and productivity**, in particular, substantially impacts employers.

However, **new treatment options for chronic migraine** make it possible for employers to consider providing health plans which allow for workers to stay on the job and keep performing at a competent level.

These are likely to deliver **cost savings** for the organisation, as well as improve health and well-being of employees.

Although migraines can be extremely debilitating, **many people are extremely effective in managing their condition** and also may experience no ill effects between episodes.

Experiencing migraines should not be a barrier to promotion and professional development at work and measures or "**reasonable accommodations**", should be taken to ensure that people who experience migraines are not treated less favourably for a reason related to their condition in the recruitment or promotion process.

It is **essential to refer employees to neurologists** and other suitable healthcare professionals for treatment.

The COVID-19 crisis has forced employers and employees to adopt practices which ensure that they won't suffer missed work time, reduced performance at work and related costs. Some of these practices have the added benefit of also helping people living with migraine.

Reasonable accommodations¹⁷

A reasonable accommodation is assistance or changes to the work environment or to work practices that will enable an employee to do her or his job despite having a disability.

Do employers have to put accommodations in place?

It is good human resource (HR) practice for employers to provide reasonable accommodation to people with underlying health conditions to promote healthy workplaces, good productivity and resilience to the workforce.

What is considered "reasonable"?

What is deemed 'reasonable' is shaped and determined by the role and scope of work, size of the organisation, the financial and logistical factors incurred by the accommodation, as well as other issues.

¹⁷ Reasonable accommodations explained. ADA National Network. <https://adata.org/factsheet/reasonable-accommodations-workplace>. Retrieved June 2020

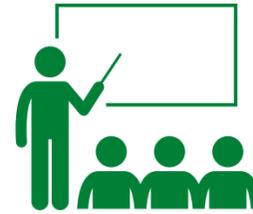
Reasonable HR practices for employee wellbeing^{5, 18}



If the job doesn't require an employee to be physically present at the office at certain times, consider **flexible hours and deliverable-based performance**. It allows employees to work when they are able to without worrying about clocking in.



Provide **time off for employees** to go for medical appointments. Employers could consider accommodating this flexibility.



Introduce **stress management training** for supervisors and employees to identify and manage stress factors within the workplace. It will help provide information and support for those suffering from migraine.



Work-from-home option allows for employees to control their environment when they feel a migraine coming on. This could help them reduce the severity of migraines or prevent them altogether.



Ensure that desks, chairs and computers at workstations are **positioned at the right height and clearance** to prevent employees into uncomfortable and awkward seating postures.



Consult **occupational safety and health professionals** on how to develop and maintain migraine-friendly workplaces.



Making **clean drinking water** available to ensure employees remain hydrated.



Manage lighting and glare. Overhead lighting may cause direct and indirect glare which reduce increase the risks of migraine. Direct or indirect glare can be managed by introducing shades, blinds or filters.



Migraine sufferers may find relief in a dark and quiet room. If you have the space for it, create a **migraine-friendly break room**.



Increasing ventilation and improving airflow in the workplace helps prevent dry and airless environment. This prevents headaches and fatigue.

Implementing these steps has the potential to improve productivity, lower turnover and lead to happier employees.

Migraine Action Plan¹⁹

Use this Action Plan as a template to guide discussions with persons with migraine to determine the kind of support or assistance possible within your work environment.

For Employees

Why should employees inform employers of their condition?

Not being informed that an employee experiences migraines, deprives employers of the ability to be more understanding and provide possible support.

Understandably, informing employers is not an easy thing to do and may be intimidating. However, doing so allows for management an opportunity to better understand how it affects the employee and introduce supportive changes.

For Employers

When should employers be involved?

An employee may choose whether or not to tell their employer that they have migraine issues.

If a migraine episode or attack has occurred at work, an employer may feel it necessary to discuss with an employee about their condition.

An employee can also request for a discussion with human resource or occupational health staff to work out an appropriate way forward.

1. How do migraines affect your work?

e.g. hard to concentrate/ focus, nauseous, blurred vision

2. What, if any, triggers your migraines?

e.g. loud noises, bright lights, certain smells

¹⁹ Adapted from Mind (2018). Wellness Action Plan and Employer Guidance. <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download>. Retrieved August 2020.

Migraine Action Plan

3. What can be done at work to help you minimise migraine attacks?

e.g. shades, changes in lighting, periodic breaks

4. What would you like your work colleagues to know about your condition?

e.g. more information on migraine, confidentiality

5. Are there any warning signs that you think your colleagues should be on a look out in case of an attack?

e.g. fatigue, disorientation

6. What should they do if they see these signs?

e.g. talk to me about it

7. What support do you need to manage migraine symptoms?

e.g. work from home, flexible working hours, access to a quiet room

Staff

Manager/ Supervisor

Date

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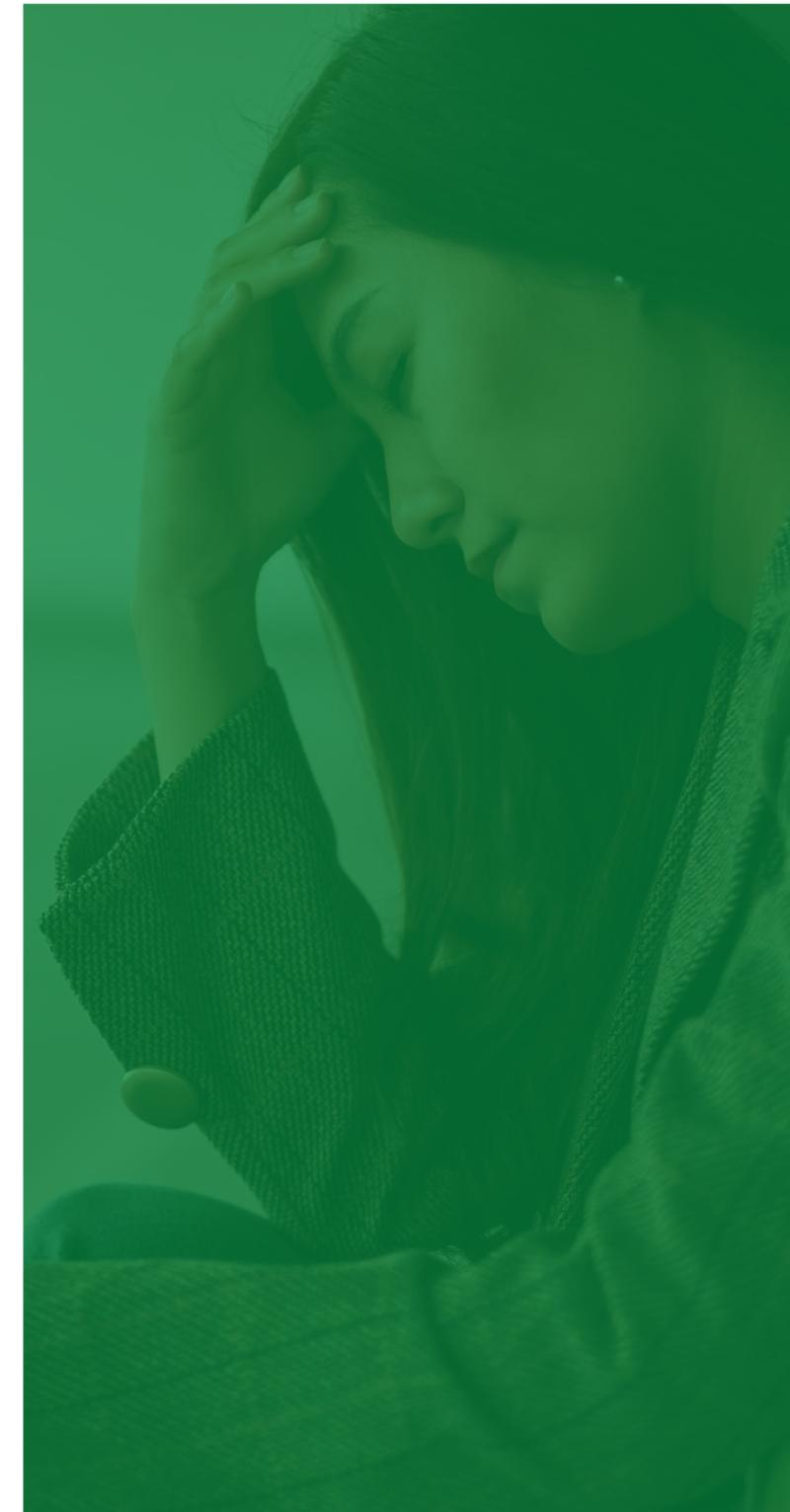
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It promotes and advocates public debate and education on ideas and proposals which support individual freedom, choice and innovation.

Social Health Analytics Sdn Bhd (1239011-M)
Suite C-13A-12, Block C, Scott Garden SOHO
Jalan Klang Lama, 58000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

T: +603 7972 2566 E: admin@galencentre.org

www.galencentre.org

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