SLEEP FIX
A serious snooze is what your migraine-plagued friend needs most.

NOT YOUR TYPICAL HEADACHE

Some 27 million women suffer from the neurological condition known as migraine, and relief isn't as simple as popping an aspirin. Help a friend, mom or sister power through the pain

The throbbing one-sided head pain she complains of may sound like a simple tension headache, but if your loved one has been diagnosed with migraine, make no mistake: She needs a little extra TLC. "Migraine is a neurological condition that produces a number of associated symptoms beyond just a headache," explains Brian Grosberg, M.D., director of the Hartford Healthcare Headache Program in Connecticut. These migraine facts can help you know what to do.

IT'S NOT JUST IN HER HEAD

The headache is only one phase of a migraine. The wave of nerve cell excitement spreading across the back of the brain when a migraine hits can cause an aura that makes a migraine sufferer's vision fragment or shimmer. She may also become more sensitive to light and sound, get nauseated or vomit and feel confused and be unable to perform tasks she'd otherwise be able to do effortlessly. A tension headache might feel similar, says Dr. Grosberg, but usually is less severe, is felt on both sides of the skull and doesn't come with the other debilitating problems.

WEIRD THINGS TRIGGER IT

A standard headache often comes on when someone is sleep-deprived or dehydrated. But the brains and nervous systems of migraine sufferers are wired to process input differently, explains Dr. Grosberg, making them more vulnerable to stimuli. Aged cheese, red wine, changes in the weather and bright lights as well as hormonal shifts, stress and eyestrain can make someone with migraines want to assume the fetal position.

SHE HAS TO TREAT IT ASAP

Cut her some slack if she bails on plans and flops on her bed. "The best thing that you can do when you have a migraine is take a nap," says Dr. Grosberg. It's good to keep an NSAID with caffeine, like Excedrin, on hand, although she may have medication her doctor has prescribed. She probably knows what works for her—e.g., a magnesium supplement, coffee or ginger tea. Offer her a heat pack or a cold washcloth to help dull her pain, and lend her sunglasses or an eye mask to protect her against light sensitivity. Give her room to recover, says Dr. Grosberg: "Find a secluded area, turn off the lights and keep quiet." ◆

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