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Not Tonight,

# I Have a Migraine Headache

## How Migraine Disrupts Women's Intimacy, Work & Lives




A deep-dive by Rescripted,
supported by Pfizer Medical Affairs

# Introduction

Migraine is often dismissed as "just a headache," but for millions of women, it's a chronic, invisible illness that disrupts not only their daily routines but also their sex lives, relationships, and emotional well-being. In an eye-opening survey from Rescripted and Pfizer, **98% of women said migraine has interfered with their ability to be sexually intimate when they wanted to — yet only 1 in 5 have openly discussed the impact of migraine on their relationships with a doctor.**

Instead, women describe canceling dates, turning down intimacy, and feeling guilty for withdrawing from sex, even when the desire is still there. Many also say their symptoms are misunderstood or dismissed by doctors, partners, and coworkers, and hormonal shifts only make things worse.

**If men lived with a condition that regularly disrupted sex, it might be treated as a public health crisis. For women, it's often something they're expected to quietly endure.**

By bringing these stories to light, this report calls for greater awareness, honest conversations, and better care — because migraine isn't just pain; it's a relationship barrier, a confidence drain, and a silent thief of time, energy, and well-being.

## Rescripted Insight

### *"If Migraine Kept Men from Having Sex, There'd Be a Cure"*

Migraine affects over 800 million women worldwide — yet it's still overlooked, dismissed, and deeply stigmatized. 98% say it disrupts their sex lives. Over half feel dismissed by doctors. This isn't just about pain — it's about being heard. It's time to rescript the narrative.



1 Section One

# Hormones & Migraine — **A Complex Connection**

Women are three times more likely than men to suffer from migraine, and hormones are a major reason why. In our survey, **94% of women linked their migraine attacks to hormonal phases,** and **1 in 4** said they feel fully like themselves (clear-headed and energized) for only **one week or less each month.**

Hormonal fluctuations, especially drops in estrogen, are a powerful trigger for migraine. Many women experience more intense, harder-to-treat attacks around their period, and that pattern can continue — or shift — throughout major hormonal life stages.

Pregnancy often brings relief, particularly in the second and third trimesters, though many women face a return of symptoms after giving birth. The transition to menopause, on the other hand, can worsen migraine or bring it on for the first time, especially for those with a history of hormonal sensitivity.

Despite how common these patterns are, they're rarely addressed in a comprehensive way, leaving many women to navigate migraine alone, without the tailored care they deserve.

## Rescripted Insight

Migraine is a complex condition that requires personalized care, yet **52% of the women we surveyed said their symptoms have been dismissed or downplayed by a healthcare provider.**



## Quotes From the Rescripted Community:

> *I track my cycle obsessively because my migraines are so predictable around my period. But it feels like I'm on my own trying to manage it.*

> *When I have a migraine, it's like the spirit and joy has been sucked out of me. I just need to be left alone, in a quiet and dark place. My mood isn't personal towards anyone and the migraine will pass, and once it does I will be back to my giving and loving self.*

# Expert Voices

*When you look at women with migraine, at least 60% have an association with their menses. The majority will have migraines at other times of the cycle as well, because there are other triggers like stress, changes in barometric pressure – sometimes dietary triggers, lack of sleep – but for most women with migraine, there will be a connection with their hormones.*

**Dr. Susan Hutchinson,**
*Family Medicine Doctor & Headache Specialist*

*There are so many different vasomotor symptoms like hot flashes and night sweats, but I think it's a very under-researched area. And I think as clinicians, we don't talk about it enough. So for me personally, I like to have a partner in OB/GYN who I can collaborate with – where I can handle the migraine management, and my OB/GYN partner locally will take care of any type of hormonal therapy, like estrogen replacement therapies and things like that.*

**Dr. Deena Kuruvilla,**
*Neurologist & Headache Specialist*

*We know migraine primarily affects women, not just during childbearing years, but also during their prime working years. That creates a lasting impact. Better treatment options, better understanding of medication safety during pregnancy and lactation – these are crucial. Often, when women become pregnant, their providers don't realize that some medications are already known to be safe. As a result, women go off meds they need to live fully. We also need better understanding of how hormones influence migraine. Menstrual migraine is a major issue. There's just so much need for more research.*

**Julienne Verdi,**
*Executive Director, Alliance for Headache Disorders Advocacy (AHDA)*

# Pro Tips For Effective Communication With Providers

**When discussing migraine with healthcare providers, helpful phrases include:**

- *Here are the ways this is impacting my life...*
- *How can we work together to find a plan?*
- *My symptoms are interfering with my ability to [work, parent, socialize]. What options do I have?*
- *'I've tried [X, Y, Z], but I'm still struggling – what else can we explore?*

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2 Section Two

# Migraine & Intimacy - **The Silent Struggle**



For many women living with migraine, the pain isn't just physical — it can reshape how they connect with their partners, and even with themselves. Our research reveals a striking reality: **98% of women say migraine attacks interfere with their ability to be sexually intimate when they want to be.** Yet, **only 1 in 5** have ever brought this up with their doctor.

Why the silence? The stigma surrounding migraine runs deep. Often misunderstood, invisible, and easily dismissed, migraine can make it difficult for women to speak openly, even about the impact on their most personal relationships.

## Quotes From the Rescripted Community

> *It's hard to explain to my partner that it's not about lack of desire, but the migraine makes everything else impossible. I feel like I'm letting them down even though I'm in pain.*

> *Migraine is not just a headache. It affects every part of my life, drains my energy, kills my desire for intimacy, makes me cancel plans, and disrupts my work and confidence as a woman. I constantly feel like I'm falling short in my roles as a partner, a professional, and a person because of something I didn't choose and can't always control.*

## Rescripted Insight

**Migraine interrupts intimacy,** but talking about it remains rare.

**55%**
of women surveyed have canceled sex because of a migraine attack.

**61%**
reported feeling less desirable or 'sexy' during migraine episodes.

**84%**
said they would be more sexually active if they didn't experience migraine.

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# Expert Voices

*When I say I can't do something because I have a migraine — believe me, I've already pushed through so much. If I say I can't, I'm disabled in that moment. We need to show grace to friends and family members who cancel plans. We already feel stigma and disappointment. When others don't understand, it's even harder. I wish people got that.*

**Julienne Verdi,**
*Executive Director, Alliance for Headache Disorders Advocacy (AHDA)*

*This is nothing to be embarrassed about. Migraine is a genetic predisposition, a neurological disease. You should not feel ashamed. You should feel like a warrior — proud of all you do despite painful, unpredictable attacks from this chronic condition.*

**Dr. Dawn Buse,**
*Clinical Psychologist*

*Many women with migraine tend to minimize their symptoms because they're trying to power through — either to be a good mother to their children or a good employee and not let the team down, so to speak. That takes a toll when you're trying to pretend everything's okay. [...] If a migraine goes untreated and the person tries to stay at work, it can get worse. It carries over into home life, the workplace, and social relationships. [...] This all means we need to — and there is a movement to — help lessen the stigma and legitimize that migraine is a neurological disease [...] and expect appropriate acute and preventive care.*

**Dr. Susan Hutchinson,**
*Family Medicine Doctor & Headache Specialist*

# Pro Tips for Managing Migraine & Intimacy

**Communicate openly with your partner.**

Being honest about your migraine experience can ease guilt and build understanding.

**Bring ID Migraine to your appointment.**

This simple, three-question screening tool can spark a more productive conversation with your provider and help guide treatment options.

**Consider therapy.**

Talking to a mental health professional can help you manage the emotional and relational stress that often comes with chronic migraine.

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3 Section Three

# Work & Life — When Migraine Interrupts Your Day

Women with migraine face a double burden — managing debilitating symptoms while battling workplace stigma. In our survey, **92% of women said they push through at work to avoid being judged, afraid they may face negative consequences.** Because migraine is so often misunderstood, many people end up hiding what they're going through, worried about being seen as unreliable.



## Rescripted Insight

Nearly **80% of those surveyed have worked through a migraine attack,** even though they couldn't perform at their best.

**59%** have called out sick because of migraine symptoms.

**1 in 5** have skipped applying for certain jobs because of migraine.

Bottom line: Migraine presents significant challenges for women in the workplace. Greater awareness and open conversations are essential to improving understanding and support in professional environments.

## Quotes From the Rescripted Community:

*Since migraines are an invisible health condition and do affect my energy and focus for my job, I wish people at my job and family understood that I'm not being lazy; I'm in pain.*

*Around that time, I was also laid off by the startup where I worked, because I wasn't a team player. I was going through the diagnostic process, unable to ride the subway, working from home, doing my best – and they told me, 'You're not a team player. Bye.'*
**Cannon Hodge, Migraine Patient Advocate (@migrainebabe)**

*I've seen that whenever I experience a migraine episode, my mind feels cloudy and it's hard to focus on anything for long. So, I avoid going out and feel uncertain whether I'd be able to function at my normal level.*

# Expert Voices

*The unpredictable nature of migraine can be really anxiety-producing or stressful. [...] Imagine you have a major court date or board presentation the next day, and symptoms start the night before. The anxiety is real: 'How am I going to get through this? Do I need to reschedule? What about childcare?' That emotional burden is very real.*

**Melissa Bronstein,** *LCSW*

*Migraine strikes during women's prime working and childbearing years... that creates a lasting impact.*

**Julienne Verdi,**
*Executive Director, Alliance for Headache Disorders Advocacy (AHDA)*

*There's also often stigma with the diagnosis of migraine. That stigma can manifest in several ways. One is that the person with migraine feels others at work think they're using the migraine for secondary gain [...] In turn, they may minimize how much they're suffering.*

**Dr. Susan Hutchinson,**
*Family Medicine Doctor & Headache Specialist*

# Pro Tips for Navigating Migraine at Work

### Educate your employer.

Help your manager and HR team understand that migraine is a legitimate neurological condition — and in some cases, a disability.

### Lean on assistive strategies.

Tools like noise-canceling headphones, regular breaks, and staying hydrated can make a big difference.

### Advocate for flexibility.

If possible, explore remote work or flexible scheduling to better manage symptoms while staying productive.

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4 **Section Four**

# Emotional Toll & Stigma — **The Hidden Weight**

Migraine is a chronic neurological disease that often goes hand-in-hand with anxiety and depression. According to our survey, **80% of women felt their migraine symptoms were dismissed or misunderstood by family members,** even though **78%** experience migraine attacks at least **one to three times a month.** This disconnect highlights just how isolating and challenging living with migraine can be — and how often women are forced to fight to have their experiences taken seriously.

## Rescripted Insight

Stigma doesn't just add to the pain — it amplifies it. **More than half of the respondents** said their symptoms had been minimized by a healthcare provider, resulting in a cycle of suffering in silence, delayed care, and a profound sense of invisibility. For many, managing migraine also means constantly advocating for themselves just to be heard. Breaking this cycle starts with validation, understanding, and real support — so no one has to fight alone.



## Quotes From Rescripted Community Members

> *I was told 'it's all in your head' so many times that I doubted my own pain. That only made my anxiety worse.*

> *I wish people understood how deeply migraines affect my ability to show up fully – as a partner, a professional, and even as myself. It's not 'just a headache.' It alters my energy, mood, confidence, and connection with others. There's guilt in canceling plans, strain in relationships, and a constant fear of being seen as unreliable. As a woman, it sometimes feels like I have to work twice as hard to be taken seriously – both at the doctor's office and in life.*

# Expert Voices

> *There's a long history in this country of minimizing women's pain. I personally believe that plays into why headache disorders, which disproportionately affect women, are so underfunded.*

**Julienne Verdi,**
*Executive Director, Alliance for Headache Disorders Advocacy (AHDA)*

> *Historically, even Freud suggested it was a hysterical reaction to stress — women who couldn't handle stress. It's stigmatized, it's invisible, and people often don't see the true effects.*

**Dr. Dawn Buse,**
Clinical Psychologist

> *What we hear a lot is women being told, 'Maybe you're just anxious,' which ties into the 'Maybe you just need to manage your stress' narrative. [...] Unfortunately, the burden often falls on women in the patient role to advocate more than they should have to. Ideally, everyone would be believed and taken seriously from day one, but advocacy becomes part of the process, and that can take skill-building.*

**Melissa Bronstein,** LCSW

# Your Migraine Emotional Support Toolbox

**Find your people.**
Peer support through migraine communities or online groups (like Facebook) can help you feel less alone.

**Try evidence-based tools.**
Mindfulness meditation and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) have been shown to reduce stress and support better pain management.

**Shift your mindset.**
These strategies can help change how you relate to your symptoms, making them easier to cope with and reducing their impact on your daily life.

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4 Section Four

# The Path Forward — **Better Treatment, More Talk**

Despite its widespread impact, migraine remains under-treated and misunderstood, especially for women. Our survey found that **84% of women believe more effective migraine treatment would help them feel more supported in maintaining intimacy and relationships.** Yet, **57%** said simply having more open conversations with their doctor would make a significant difference.

**Rescripted Insight**

Women aren't just looking for better medications — they want treatments that fit their lives, and healthcare providers who truly listen and understand.

## Quotes From the Rescripted Community:

> *The pain and associated symptoms can be very debilitating. It is not just your head hurting, it is the nausea, vomiting, auditory, and light sensitivity. It can be bad enough to affect my function in all areas of life.*

> *If migraines were a man's problem, there'd be a cure by now. It's time women's pain is taken seriously.*



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# Expert Voices

*There's definitely a shortage of specialists across the board – and doctors in general – but the shortage is especially significant when it comes to neurologists, and even more so for headache specialists. I think the last number I saw was around 700 headache specialists for the 60 million people in the U.S. who live with migraine.*

**Dr. Deena Kuruvilla,**
*Neurologist & Headache Specialist*

*Migraine is a legitimate neurological disease [...] You deserve appropriate treatment. You deserve not to be stigmatized. While we can't cure migraine, the goal with proper treatment is to have infrequent attacks [...] The goal is to be migraine-free [...] back to full function in two hours. That's achievable for the majority.*

**Dr. Susan Hutchinson,**
*Family Medicine Doctor & Headache Specialist*

# How You Can Help Yourself

**Keep a migraine diary.**

Tracking symptoms and triggers helps identify patterns and leads to better treatment outcomes.

**Use SEEDS for success.**

This simple lifestyle framework — Sleep, Exercise, Eat, Diary, Stress — supports consistent self-care and keeps your treatment on track.

**Advocate for integrated care.**

Combining neurology, women's health, and mental health ensures a holistic approach to managing migraine.

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# Conclusion:
# It's Not "Just a Headache"

Migraine touches every part of a woman's life — intimacy, work, mental health, and more. It's a complex disease demanding better awareness, empathy, and care.

## Key Takeaways

- Migraine disrupts intimacy for nearly all women living with it.
- Hormones deeply influence migraine patterns and treatment needs.
- Workplace stigma harms careers and well-being.
- Emotional support and therapy improve quality of life.
- New treatments and advocacy can change the landscape.

**Together, by sharing stories and pushing for better care, we can break the silence around migraine and improve outcomes for women everywhere.**



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