



The Worst Headache of My Life! **Benjamin H. Venger, MD, FACS**

Everyone at sometime suffers from headaches. Some are due to poor vision and go away when vision is corrected by glasses or contact lenses. Others are "migraines", headaches which can be associated with abnormal sensations, such as flashes of light, funny tastes or smells, and other unusual feelings or perceptions.

Headaches which occur both at day and night, and just don't go away, should also be brought to the attention of your doctor. This is especially true if other neurologic problems occur, such as weakness, numbness or problems with walking or memory. Causes of this type of pain, which comes on over days, weeks or months, could be a tumor, infection, stroke or blood clot. Rarely does this type of headache pose an immediate danger, but certainly should not be ignored.

The onset of a sudden, intense, severe headache, without warning, also may signal a very serious and dangerous emergency - subarachnoid hemorrhage. Nearly all individuals describe this pain as "the worst headache of their life"! This type of headache can be associated with stiffness in the neck, sensitivity to light, nausea and vomiting, and in some cases seizures.

Most commonly, subarachnoid hemorrhage occurs when bleeding results from a blood vessel abnormality; generally a congenital dilation in the wall of the blood vessel (aneurysm), or an abnormal collection of blood vessels, through which blood can flow unregulated (AVMs [arteriovenous malformation]). Either lesion must be immediately evaluated and treated. Options include brain surgery, embolization (or stopping the blood flow through blood vessel catheters), and in the case of AVMs, even Gamma Knife radiation.

Subarachnoid hemorrhage can also occur due to uncontrolled blood pressure, or due to non-prescription drug use. A CT or MRI scan, or angiogram (injection of dye through catheters into the brain's blood vessels) is necessary to diagnose the cause of the headache. In 10% of all cases, no specific abnormality or lesion is ever found. If there is a suspicion that you or someone may have more than just a routine headache or migraine, please contact Drs. Venger, Anson or Duke at (800) 334-0878 for an appointment in our offices in Laughlin, Bullhead City, Kingman, Lake Havasu, and Needles.