

Migraine sufferers caused \$1.04b loss last year: Study

✓ **FELICIA CHOO**

Migraine sufferers caused about \$1.04 billion in economic losses in Singapore last year, a local study has found.

Productivity loss made up 80 per cent of the cost, with the remaining 20 per cent attributed to healthcare costs.

People who experienced these chronic headaches also missed an average of 9.8 work days a year, and for those who continued working, the symptoms greatly reduced their ability to perform tasks, amounting to productivity loss of 7.4 days each year.

A migraine often progresses through several stages. Symptoms include constipation, irritability and visual disturbances, before the actual headache occurs. It lasts between four and 72 hours, mostly affects 30- to 40-year-olds, and is more common in adult women than men due to hormonal changes.

More than 600 full-time Singapore workers who suffered from migraines were surveyed online for the study, Economic Burden of Migraine in Singapore, conducted by Duke-NUS Medical School and pharmaceutical company Novartis.

Researchers found that those who had migraines on four to 14 days each month incurred a per capita cost of \$14,860 last year.

The cost was \$5,040 for those who had migraines on only three or fewer days each month.

Dr Jonathan Ong from the National University Hospital said 100 new patients turn up every month at the clinic for headache disorders at the hospital and Ng Teng Fong General Hospital. That figure has been increasing by about 10 per cent each year.

“It is not surprising because we are increasingly living in a stressful environment, being an Asian country – we’re very work-driven, goal-orientated, spending longer hours at work, and stress is a major trigger for migraines,” he said.

Medical tests made up 41 per cent of the healthcare cost, followed by alternative medications (18 per cent), consultations (16 per cent), hospitalisations (13 per cent) and medications (11 per cent).

Researchers hope the results will raise awareness about migraines so more people can be properly diagnosed.

feliciac@sph.com.sg