

## Kids wired for pain?

**Video games, iPods among causes for increase in migraines among children**

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ELGIN — Since age 5, Fran Cella has battled migraines.

"I was really quite young and people were always commenting on how odd it was that I would get these headaches," said the Elgin woman, whose mother and sister also suffer from migraines. "But I didn't get a full-blown migraine until I was in seventh grade."



**Joseph Iannello (center), 9, plays a video game as his nephews Cesar Rojas (left), 3, and Agustin Villagomez, also 3, watch. Some believe electronic gadgets — such as video games and iPods — may play a role in the growing number of children getting migraines.**

*(Photo illustration by Marina Makropoulos/Staff Photographer)*

That's when she awoke in the middle of the night in blinding pain. "I couldn't see," she said, "and it was terrifying."

Her migraine episodes, which have not subsided more than half a century later, include vomiting, light sensitivity and the inability to sleep or, for that matter, see.

"They're disabling; it's like being sick," she added. "You're in bed with the blinds closed and ice on your head."

As a child, Cella was not alone.

About 1 out of every 20 kids, or about 8 million children in the United States, gets migraines, according to KidsHealth, a popular Web site run by the Nemours Foundation, a nonprofit organization devoted to improving the health of children.

Before reaching age 10, an equal number of boys and girls get migraines. But after age 12, migraines affect girls three times more often than boys, according to KidsHealth.

Dr. M. Medaline Santiago, a general physician with APL Algonquin Pediatrics, an affiliate of Sherman Hospital, said for "various reasons, kids have a lot of migraines." Triggers include stress, a family history of migraines, menstruation, lack of sleep, skipping meals, not staying hydrated and too much caffeine.

Lately, Santiago — who treats about 12 adolescent patients with migraines each month — has seen an increase in those numbers. The culprit, she said, might be tied to electronic gadgets.

Children are "focusing on tiny screens, whether it's a computer, a video game, a phone or an iPod," she said. "Kids are on Facebook and everything else on the Internet, and they're on there for hours and hours."

That could translate, she said, to inadequate sleep, which can lead to tension headaches. Also, headaches can be the result of muscle sprains in the neck or shoulders.

Dr. Thida Maw, a Carpentersville pediatrician, agrees. In addition to doctors being more conscious of migraines, "most children nowadays don't get enough sleep" and because of "extracurriculars and academics, there's so much stress."

What are migraines?

Doctors say migraines are more than your usual headache. "Kids feel nauseous, so they're not" able to participate in school and activities, Santiago said. And prior to migraines, "they sometimes have visual auras, meaning they see little spots on the front of their eyes."

While adults can take prescription medicine such as Demerol, most painkillers are not approved for anyone younger than 18. In most cases, children can take preventative measures that include sitting in a dark room with the lights off, and taking Advil or Motrin before the pain begins.

But Maw points out that physicians have to be careful not to overuse these drugs, because they could lead to more headaches.

Both local doctors say if severe headaches or migraines are frequent, the child should be referred to a neurologist to check for any brain masses or tumors.

That's why "it's important to be proactive," Santiago added. "And if you think you have a migraine, you should bring it up at a routine check-up or physical."