

Migraine/Headache & School

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND REQUESTING A 504 PLAN

Migraine and other headache disorders are among the most common medical conditions in school-age kids, with migraine affecting roughly 1 in 10 students. If your child is dealing with migraine/headache, a 504 plan can help.

1. What Is a 504 Plan?

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal civil rights law. It prohibits any school that receives federal funding from discriminating against a student because of a disability. A 504 plan removes barriers through accommodations, so your child has equal access to the same general education curriculum as their classmates.

NOTE: A 504 plan is different from an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which falls under a separate law (IDEA) and provides specialized instruction.

2. Could My Child Qualify?

In December 2024, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights confirmed that migraine can qualify a student for Section 504 protection. Under federal guidance, migraine can substantially limit a “major life activity,” a category that includes concentrating, reading, thinking, communicating, and underlying neurological functioning.

Consider raising a 504 plan with your child's provider if any of this sounds familiar:

- **School functioning:** Missed assignments, exams, or class time due to migraine/headaches, or trouble concentrating and staying alert afterward
- **Basic needs:** Difficulty accessing water, the restroom, or a dark place to rest once a migraine starts
- **Triggers at school:** Lighting, noise, heat, stress, or long stretches of screen time bring on or worsen attacks
- **Ongoing worry:** Your child feels anxious about symptoms getting in the way of school, even between attacks

3. Helpful Accommodations for Migraine/Headache

A 504 plan should be tailored to your child. Here are some accommodations to consider with your school:

Breaks, in class and out

- A quick, subtle way to pause or step out during class when symptoms start, such as a hallway pass or hand signal
- A specific place to go for a longer break, decided in advance so your child isn't left figuring it out mid-attack, such as the nurse's office, wellness center, counselor's room, or another quiet space
- Permission to use breaks both *preventively* (for example, a 5-minute walk up and down the hall while deep breathing half way through a class to interrupt trigger stacking) or *acutely* (for example, a longer rest in the wellness center to take medications and listen to a relaxation exercise after a migraine starts)

Environment & sensory tools

- Adjustments such as non-fluorescent lighting, reduced scent exposure, or permission to wear sunglasses or a hat
- Access to water and snacks during class
- Permission to use headphones during work or study periods for music or a relaxation exercise
- A modified PE routine when light, sound, or exertion worsen symptoms

Materials & screen time

- Audio textbooks, speech-to-text or text-to-speech tools, or paper alternatives to reduce screen exposure
- Access to class materials at home during a migraine attack, so your child doesn't fall behind

Absences & timing

- Excused absences, tardies, and early dismissals connected to migraine and/or medical appointments
- Make-up work without penalty, and advance notice of assignments when possible

Testing & assignments

- Extra time on tests and assignments, plus periodic rest breaks during exams

Medication access

- A clear plan for when and how your child can take rescue medication at school, including where it's stored and who administers it
- **NOTE:** Schools typically require documentation from a child's medical provider to store medication or allow self-carry.

A modified schedule, if needed

- A later start time on mornings (if child's migraine tends to be worse at the start of the day and need extra sleep)
- A free period placed midday to build in a natural break (if child's symptoms tend to build during the day)

Communication & privacy

- A designated point of contact to help coordinate the plan and communicate with teachers
- Regular check-ins scheduled with this point person to problem-solve small problems prior to major issues
- Confidentiality of your child's medical information

If Your Child Feels Uncomfortable Using Their Plan

Sometimes kids avoid using accommodations, even ones they think would be helpful, because they don't want to feel singled out or different from classmates. Include your child in the planning process. A plan your child will use is more valuable than a longer list they're self-conscious to try.

4. How to Request a 504 Plan

Step 1: Talk with your child's headache provider. A written 504 request generally needs a letter describing the diagnosis and recommended accommodations. Many pediatric headache and neurology programs ask for about two weeks' notice to prepare a letter, so it's best to request one early.

If Your Child is a Streamind Health Patient

Ask your child's Streamind therapist about a personalized 504 letter. This is something we're glad to help with.

Bring your child's **Coping Skills Menu** to the school meeting too. It can help teachers understand the strategies your child is already using to manage symptoms during the day.

Step 2: Submit the letter to your school in writing, usually to a counselor, administrator, or the designated 504 coordinator, and keep a dated copy for your records.

Step 3: Expect a response and a meeting. Most schools respond within about 30 days (with variability between districts), and schools are required to have a formal process for handling 504-related concerns.

Step 4: Come prepared to the meeting. Bring the provider letter, any notes on how migraine/headache has affected school so far, and a clear list of which accommodations matter most to your child.

5. If Accommodations Aren't Being Followed

Most bumps in a 504 plan come from a miscommunication:

Start with a conversation

- Write down specifics to keep the conversation concrete: what should have happened, what actually happened, and when.
- Reach out to the teacher directly, ideally in writing. Most teachers want to help and may just need a reminder of what's in the plan.
- If the same thing keeps happening, loop in your child's 504 coordinator and ask for a check-in meeting.

If you need more support

Your state's *Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center* offers free, one-on-one guidance for school advocacy for families of children with disabilities, find yours through the [national PTI directory](#).

6. More Free Resources

- **U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights:** [Section 504 Protections for Students with Migraine](#)
- **American Headache Society:** [Resources to Support Students with Headache](#)
- **Children's Hospital of Philadelphia:** [FAQs about 504 Plans](#)
- **Migraine at School:** [Support for Parents](#)
- **American Migraine Foundation:** [Managing Your Child's Migraine in School](#)
- **National Headache Foundation:** [Section 504 Protections for Students with Migraine](#)

This guide is for general education and does not replace individualized medical or legal advice. For personalized 504 support, please reach out to your Streamind Health or medical provider.

Developed With Reference to the Following Resources

- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights: [Section 504 Protections for Students with Migraine](#) (fact sheet, December 2024)
- U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights: [Parent and Educator Resource Guide to Section 504 in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) (December 2016)
- Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center: [Find your local PTI](#) (free family advocacy support)
- American Headache Society: [Resources to Support Students with Headache](#) (June 2025)
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia: [FAQs about 504 Plans](#)
- Migraine at School: [Support for Parents](#) (a program of the Danielle Byron Henry Migraine Foundation)
- American Migraine Foundation: [Managing Your Child's Migraine in School](#)
- National Headache Foundation: [Section 504 Protections for Students with Migraine](#)
- UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals, Child & Adolescent Headache Program: [Information About the 504 Plan](#) (family handout)