






# Headache

Headache is a common presentation in general practice. There are multiple causes, but most headaches are benign and don't need investigation. The difficulty for a GP registrar is differentiating between a simple cause and something more serious requiring further investigation or immediate action.

|   |  |             |  |               |  |
|---|--|-------------|--|---------------|--|
| <p><b>TEACHING AND LEARNING AREAS</b></p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common and serious causes of headache in general practice</li> <li>• Common headache classifications – primary/secondary, and thunderclap/acute/subacute/chronic</li> <li>• 'Red flag' symptoms and signs of headache</li> <li>• Approach to a neurological examination for headache</li> <li>• Indications for investigation</li> <li>• Treatment options for common headaches, including non-pharmacological and medication options</li> <li>• Indications for referral</li> <li>• Approach to headaches in children</li> </ul>   |             |  |               |  |
| <p><b>PRE-SESSION ACTIVITIES</b></p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">NPS Headache: Diagnosis, management and prevention</a></li> <li>• Ask your registrar to select a patient who recently presented with headache to discuss</li> </ul>   |             |  |               |  |
| <p><b>TEACHING TIPS AND TRAPS</b></p>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking a comprehensive history is the most important element of assessment of headache</li> <li>• A headache diary can be very informative</li> <li>• High blood pressure very rarely causes headache</li> <li>• Don't forget headache as a presentation of depression or anxiety</li> <li>• 'Combination' headaches ('tension-vascular' headaches) are common</li> <li>• 90% of headaches in general practice are primary (tension, migraine or cluster)</li> <li>• Medication overuse headache is a very common cause of chronic headache</li> <li>• Imaging is not required in the absence of red flags or other features of a sinister cause</li> </ul> |             |  |               |  |
| <p><b>RESOURCES</b></p>                        | <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="325 1626 434 1765"><b>Read</b></td> <td data-bbox="434 1626 1493 1765"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Diagnostic Imaging Pathway for Headache</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Chronic Headache AFP RACGP</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">International Headache Society Guidelines</a></li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="325 1765 434 1827"><b>Listen</b></td> <td data-bbox="434 1765 1493 1827"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Broome Docs Headache Podcast</a></li> </ul> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>   | <b>Read</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Diagnostic Imaging Pathway for Headache</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Chronic Headache AFP RACGP</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">International Headache Society Guidelines</a></li> </ul> | <b>Listen</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Broome Docs Headache Podcast</a></li> </ul> |
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| <p><b>FOLLOW UP/ EXTENSION ACTIVITIES</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registrar to complete the clinical reasoning challenge and discuss with the supervisor</li> <li>• Role play challenging scenarios e.g. migraine resistant to standard treatment</li> </ul>  |             |  |               |  |

# Headache

## Clinical Reasoning Challenge

Hamish is a 28 year old university student who presents with a two week history of headache. He denies any other symptoms and denies any recent head injury. Examination, including a full neurological examination, is normal.

QUESTION 1. What other red flags should be sought to exclude a potentially serious cause? List SIX.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION 2. Hamish admits to finding the university course very stressful. You suspect a tension-type headache. What key features of the nature of the headache would support a diagnosis of tension-type headache? List SIX.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION 3. What broad management strategies would you implement in managing Hamish's headache? List FOUR.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_

# Headache

## ANSWERS

### QUESTION 1

What other red flags should be sought to exclude a potentially serious cause? List SIX.

- Anticoagulant medication
- History of cancer or immunodeficiency
- Waking from sleep by headache
- Fever
- Neck stiffness
- Progressive worsening

### QUESTION 2

Hamish admits to finding the university course very stressful. You suspect a tension-type headache. What key features of the nature of the headache would support a diagnosis of tension-type headache? List SIX.

- Headache lasting 30 minutes to 7 days
- Bilateral
- Dull (non-pulsating) quality
- Mild to moderate pain intensity
- No relation to physical activity
- No nausea or vomiting

### QUESTION 3

What broad management strategies would you implement in managing Hamish's headache? List FOUR.

- Reassurance and education
- Stress reduction and mindfulness training
- Medications
- Lifestyle factors – alcohol, caffeine, exercise