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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHING AND LEARNING AREAS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Common and serious causes of headache in general practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>- ’Red flag’ symptoms and signs of headache and indications for investigation</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Treatment options for common headaches, including non-pharmacological and medication options</td>
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<td>- Indications for referral</td>
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<td>- Approach to headaches in children</td>
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<th>PRE-SESSION ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>- NPS Headache: Diagnosis, management and prevention This is an excellent overview for the management of common headaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ask your registrar to select a patient who recently presented with headache to discuss</td>
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<th>TEACHING TIPS AND TRAPS</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Taking a comprehensive history is the most important element of assessment of headache</td>
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<td>- A headache diary can be very informative</td>
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<td>- Don’t forget headache as a presentation of depression or anxiety</td>
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<th>RESOURCES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Read</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Diagnostic Imaging Pathway for Headache</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Chronic Headache AFP RACGP</td>
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<td>- International Headache Society Guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen</td>
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<td>- Broome Docs Headache Podcast</td>
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<th>FOLLOW UP/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Ask the registrar to complete the Clinical Reasoning Challenge under exam conditions (7 minutes duration) and discuss afterwards</td>
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<td>- Role play challenging scenarios e.g. migraine resistant to standard treatment</td>
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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
ANSWERS

QUESTION 1
• Anticoagulant medication
• History of cancer or immunodeficiency
• Waking from sleep by headache
• Fever
• Neck stiffness
• Progressive worsening

QUESTION 2
• 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
• Reassurance and education
• Stress reduction and mindfulness training
• Medications
• Lifestyle factors – alcohol, caffeine, exercise