

Headache

Introduction

Headache is one of the most common presentations in Primary Care and the commonest reported symptom by the general population¹. Every year around 78% of the population will experience a headache¹. The consultation rate in General Practice in the UK for headache is 4.4 per 100 registered patients. Of this number, around 2% are referred onto secondary care². Around 3 million workdays are lost due to migraine in the UK alone, each year³. There is a huge economic consequence to society; including healthcare time and referrals, absenteeism from work, and presenteeism when people attend work unable to function properly⁴.

Less than 1% of headache is due to serious underlying secondary pathology. However, the fear of missing that 1% can cause considerable anxiety and concern amongst clinicians, including those in 'out of hours' and emergency medicine settings. Only 1% of brain tumours are detected from urgent suspicion of cancer referral pathways, the majority arise from emergency presentation⁵.

Neurological examination is an essential tool in clarifying the diagnosis of headache but can be time consuming. This module hopes to provide a helpful guide towards what can be done in a few minutes in the Primary Care setting. The module also aims to cover headache red flags and guidance on when referral to secondary care is indicated or referral for further imaging, depending on local health board policy.

People can have co-existing causes of headache. An example of this is medication overuse headache, which generally exists only in those patients with a pre-existing chronic pain or primary headache disorder, such as tension-type headache or migraine⁶.

Module aims:

- To review headache red flags and indications for specialist referral
- To learn about common primary headaches and their management, including tension headache and migraine
- To develop a system for detection and management of medication overuse headache
- To review trigeminal neuralgia and its treatment in primary care