

cases of suspected colonic obstruction (without perforation), a contrast enema may be diagnostic.

In the absence of trauma, peritoneal lavage has been replaced as a diagnostic tool by CT scanning and laparoscopy. Ultrasonography has proved to be useful in detecting an enlarged gallbladder or pancreas, the presence of gallstones, an enlarged ovary, or a tubal pregnancy. Laparoscopy is especially helpful in diagnosing pelvic conditions, such as ovarian cysts, tubal pregnancies, salpingitis, and acute appendicitis.

Radioisotopic hepatobiliary iminodiacetic acid scans (HIDAs) may help differentiate acute cholecystitis or biliary colic from acute pancreatitis. A CT scan may demonstrate an enlarged pancreas, ruptured spleen, or thickened colonic or appendiceal wall and streaking of the mesocolon or mesoappendix characteristic of diverticulitis or appendicitis.

Sometimes, even under the best circumstances with all available aids and with the greatest of clinical skill, a definitive diagnosis cannot be established at the time of the initial examination. Nevertheless, even in the absence of a clear anatomic diagnosis, it may be abundantly clear to an experienced and thoughtful physician and surgeon that operation is indicated on clinical grounds alone. Should that decision be questionable, watchful waiting with repeated questioning and examination will often elucidate the true nature of the illness and indicate the proper course of action.

21 Headache

Peter J. Goadsby, Neil H. Raskin

Headache is among the most common reasons patients seek medical attention, on a global basis being responsible for more disability than any other neurologic problem. Diagnosis and management are based on a careful clinical approach augmented by an understanding of the anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology of the nervous system pathways mediating the various headache syndromes. This chapter will focus on the general approach to a patient with headache; migraine and other primary headache disorders are discussed in [Chap. 447](#).

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

A classification system developed by the International Headache Society (www.ihs-headache.org/) characterizes headache as primary or secondary ([Table 21-1](#)). *Primary headaches* are those in which headache and its associated features are the disorder in itself, whereas *secondary headaches* are those caused by exogenous disorders (Headache Classification Committee of the International Headache Society, 2013). Primary headache often results in considerable disability and a decrease in the patient's quality of life. Mild secondary headache, such as that seen in association with upper respiratory tract infections, is

TABLE 21-1 COMMON CAUSES OF HEADACHE

Primary Headache		Secondary Headache	
Type	%	Type	%
Tension-type	69	Systemic infection	63
Migraine	16	Head injury	4
Idiopathic stabbing	2	Vascular disorders	1
Exertional	1	Subarachnoid hemorrhage	<1
Cluster	0.1	Brain tumor	0.1

Source: After J Olesen et al: *The Headaches*. Philadelphia, Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2005.

common but rarely worrisome. Life-threatening headache is relatively uncommon, but vigilance is required in order to recognize and appropriately treat such patients.

ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY OF HEADACHE

Pain usually occurs when peripheral nociceptors are stimulated in response to tissue injury, visceral distension, or other factors ([Chap. 18](#)). In such situations, pain perception is a normal physiologic response mediated by a healthy nervous system. Pain can also result when pain-producing pathways of the peripheral or central nervous system (CNS) are damaged or activated inappropriately. Headache may originate from either or both mechanisms. Relatively few cranial structures are pain-producing; these include the scalp, middle meningeal artery, dural sinuses, falx cerebri, and proximal segments of the large pial arteries. The ventricular ependyma, choroid plexus, pial veins, and much of the brain parenchyma are not pain-producing.

The key structures involved in primary headache appear to be the following:

- The large intracranial vessels and dura mater and the peripheral terminals of the trigeminal nerve that innervate these structures
- The caudal portion of the trigeminal nucleus, which extends into the dorsal horns of the upper cervical spinal cord and receives input from the first and second cervical nerve roots (the trigeminocervical complex)
- Rostral pain-processing regions, such as the ventroposteromedial thalamus and the cortex
- The pain-modulatory systems in the brain that modulate input from trigeminal nociceptors at all levels of the pain-processing pathways and influence vegetative functions, such as hypothalamus and brainstem structures

The innervation of the large intracranial vessels and dura mater by the trigeminal nerve is known as the *trigeminovascular system*. Cranial autonomic symptoms, such as *lacrimation, conjunctival injection, nasal congestion, rhinorrhea, periorbital swelling, aural fullness, and ptosis*, are prominent in the trigeminal autonomic cephalalgias, including cluster headache and paroxysmal hemicrania, and may also be seen in migraine, even in children. These autonomic symptoms reflect activation of cranial parasympathetic pathways, and functional imaging studies indicate that vascular changes in migraine and cluster headache, when present, are similarly driven by these cranial autonomic systems. Moreover, they can often be mistaken for symptoms or signs of cranial sinus inflammation, which is thus overdiagnosed and inappropriately managed. Migraine and other primary headache types are not “vascular headaches”; these disorders do not reliably manifest vascular changes, and treatment outcomes cannot be predicted by vascular effects. Migraine is a brain disorder and is best understood and managed as such.

CLINICAL EVALUATION OF ACUTE, NEW-ONSET HEADACHE

The patient who presents with a new, severe headache has a differential diagnosis that is quite different from the patient with recurrent headaches over many years. In new-onset and severe headache, the probability of finding a potentially serious cause is considerably greater than in recurrent headache. Patients with recent onset of pain require prompt evaluation and appropriate treatment. Serious causes to be considered include meningitis, subarachnoid hemorrhage, epidural or subdural hematoma, glaucoma, tumor, and purulent sinusitis. When worrisome symptoms and signs are present ([Table 21-2](#)), rapid diagnosis and management are critical.

A careful neurologic examination is an essential first step in the evaluation. In most cases, patients with an abnormal examination or a history of recent-onset headache should be evaluated by a computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) study. As an initial screening procedure for intracranial pathology in this setting, CT and MRI methods appear to be equally sensitive. In some circumstances, a lumbar puncture (LP) is also required, unless a benign etiology can be otherwise established. A general evaluation of acute headache might include cranial arteries by palpation; cervical spine by