

Adult Headache Primary Care Pathway

- Do you have a headache all the time or does it come & go? (Tension Type Headache or Medicines Overuse Headache usually has pain all the time)
 - If intermittent what do you do when you have the pain? (patients with migraine want to lie/sit still when pain is bad, those with cluster headaches can't sit still when having an attack)
 - What medication have you taken before? What are you taking now?

Patient attends with Headache

Take history & examine including BP, Temporal arteries (if age > 50years) & fundoscopy

Eliminate red flags

Primary Headache
 The major types are listed below – it is important to realise however that patients may present with more than one type, so can develop tension type headaches on underlying migraine, or medication overuse with tension type headaches
 NICE recommends keeping a headache diary

Secondary headache - non serious cause

Posterior headaches often relate to cervicogenic headaches
 Unlikely to be sinuses, TMJ dysfunction or teeth unless other signs /symptoms indicative of this
 Consider medication – esp combined oral contraceptive pill (OCP). If patient has migraines with aura then OCP is contraindicated
 Consider facial pain trigeminal neuralgia as a cause of 'headache'

Red Flags - Headache that is new or unexpected in an individual patient

- Thunderclap headache (intense headache of "explosive" onset suggest SAH)
- Jaw claudication (suggests temporal arteritis - take ESR /CRP & start steroids immediately)
- Headache with atypical aura (duration >1 hour, or including significant / prolonged motor weakness)
- Headache associated with postural change (bending) or coughing (possible raised ICP)
- New onset headache in patient with history of cancer, especially if < 20 years
- Unilateral red eye – consider angle closure glaucoma
- Remember carbon monoxide poisoning (also causes lethargy + nausea)
- Rapid progression of sub-acute focal neurological deficit*
- Rapid progression of unexplained cognitive impairment / behavioural disturbance*
- Rapid progression of personality changes confirmed by witness where there is no reasonable explanation*
- New onset headache in a patient with a history of HIV / immunosuppression*
- New onset headache in a patient older than 50 years *
- Headache causing patients to wake from sleep*

Most people who attend their GP with recurrent / chronic headaches have a migraine.
 A recurrent severe headache associated with nausea and photophobia is 98% predictive of migraine

Consider admission, urgent MRI/CT scan (marked *) or 2ww referral as appropriate.

Migraine without aura

Migraine with aura

Tension type headache (TTH)

Medication Overuse (MOH)

Cluster headache

Diagnostic criteria - at least 5 attacks fulfilling criteria 1-4
 1) Lasts 4-72 hours untreated
 2) At least 2 of the following
 Unilateral location
 Pulsating quality
 Moderate/severe pain
 3) Nausea / vomiting and/or photophobia
 4) No other cause identified
Chronic migraine with or without aura Occurring everyday needs specialist Review

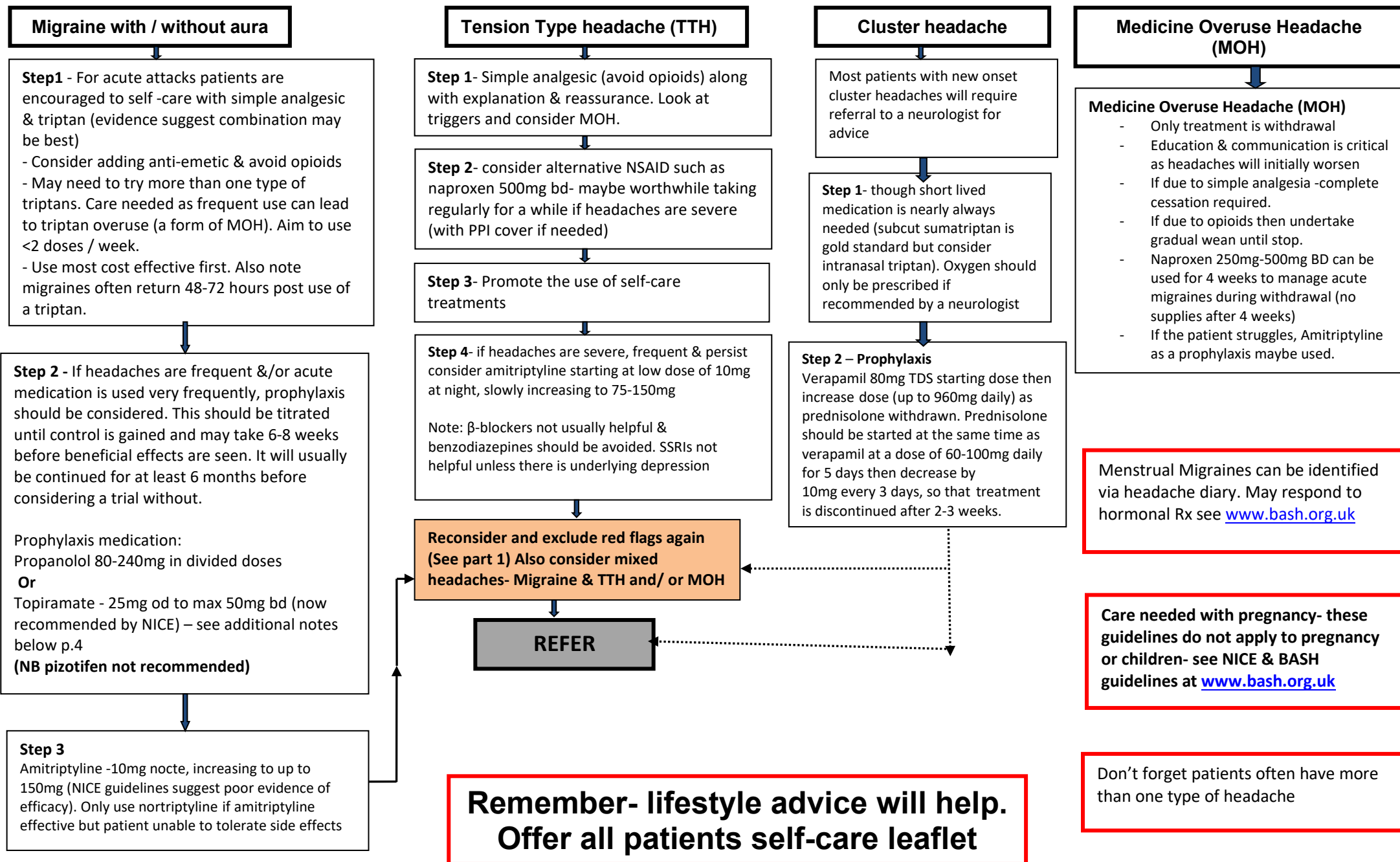
Occurs in 1/3 of migraine sufferers
 Aura 5-60 minutes prior to headache
 Usually visual – note blurring & spots not diagnostic
Chronic migraine with or without aura occurring everyday needs specialist review

Usually episodic. Usually last 30mins to 7 days
 Described as pressing/tight
 Deemed chronic if >15days per month
 Often assoc. with stress / anxiety /depression
 Can occur in combination with migraine and secondary headache triggers especially cervicogenic /neck problems

Medication history is crucial especially use of over the counter analgesia. Can be caused by simple analgesic and opioid medication.
 Can occur with other headache types
 Prophylaxis medication doesn't help & can worsen symptoms

Affects M:F (3:1 ratio)
 Usually aged 20+ years
 Bouts last 6-12 weeks.
 Usually occur 1-2x year, often at same time of year.
 Rarely chronic throughout year.
 Very severe – often at night & lasts 30-60 minutes
 Strictly unilateral
 Ipsilateral conjunctival injection, rhinorrhea +/- Ptosis confirm

Adult Headache Pathway



Adult Headache Guideline

The following information is to support prescribers regarding the medicines aspects of the pathway, please refer to the BNF or Summary of Product Characteristics for further information on contraindications, precautions, adverse effects and interactions.

Treatment of acute migraine

A stepped approach is often recommended commencing as early as possible with an analgesic and anti-emetics/pro-kinetic if required, and escalating to a 5HT₁ receptor agonist (triptan) if this approach fails.

Aspirin or ibuprofen with or without paracetamol	Need to establish therapeutic levels quickly aspirin 600-900mg TDS or ibuprofen 400-600mg up to QDS and/or paracetamol 1g QDS
Metoclopramide or Domperidone or Prochlorperazine (Buccal)	Add an anti-emetic (such as metoclopramide, domperidone, or prochlorperazine) even in the absence of nausea and vomiting. Buccal prochlorperazine is recommended if actively vomiting. Domperidone should be used for a maximum of 7 days & Metoclopramide for a maximum of 5 days
Diclofenac suppositories	Diclofenac 50mg or 100mg – see notes below. Should be considered if vomiting

Notes:

1. Please be aware of recent MHRA guidance on the use of [anti-emetics](#) and [diclofenac](#).
2. Medication should be given as soon as the onset of an attack is recognised.
3. The addition of a gastric motility agent will aid gastric emptying, as well as relieving nausea.
4. Anti-migraine drugs containing Metoclopramide are not suitable for patients under the age of 20 years.
5. Since peristalsis is often reduced in migraine attacks, dispersible preparations may be helpful.
6. Suppositories are useful if vomiting or severe nausea present.

Triptans (5HT₁-receptor agonists)

Try using the most cost-effective preparation first line, current Derbyshire formulary triptans are listed below.

Sumatriptan (first line)	Tablets 50, 100mg/ Injection 6mg per 0.5ml Nasal spray 10mg or 20mg per 0.1ml/dose
Zolmitriptan	Tablets 2.5mg or oro-dispersible 2.5, 5mg

Notes:

1. NICE recommends that oral triptans should be used first line and other preparations only considered if these are ineffective or not tolerated.
2. A second Triptan should not be taken if the first dose is ineffective.
3. Where appropriate, medication should be prescribed generically.
4. Triptans are contraindicated in, uncontrolled hypertension, or risk factors for coronary heart disease or cerebral vascular disease.
5. Different Triptans have different profiles of 5HT site action. If the first Triptan tried fails, it is worth trying alternative ones. A pragmatic approach would be to choose the cheapest one from each group as a first line.
6. Oral sumatriptan (50 mg or 100 mg) is suitable for most people. Zolmitriptan, is the Derbyshire formulary alternative if sumatriptan is not effective.
7. If vomiting restricts oral treatment, consider a non-oral formulation (such as zolmitriptan nasal spray or subcutaneous sumatriptan).
8. 'Oro-dispersible' preparations which dissolve on the tongue are absorbed after swallowing and are not classified as non-oral preparations.

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Self care advice for patients.

The SEEDS mnemonic describes five types of lifestyle changes that can reduce environmental triggers and help manage migraine

- Sleep
- Exercise
- Eat (food & hydration)
- Diary
- Stress

A useful patient information guide can be found within the appendix of this guideline and should be offered to all patients with migraines.

Prevention of migraine

Prophylaxis is used to reduce the number of attacks in circumstances when acute therapy, used appropriately, gives inadequate symptom control. There are no specific guidelines as to when prophylaxis should be commenced. Considerations include frequency, impact, failure of acute therapy, avoidance of medication overuse headache. The potential for teratogenic effects should be noted particularly with anti-epileptic medications. In line with NICE recommendations these updated guidelines no longer include a recommendation to use pizotifen or gabapentin. Additionally, propranolol is now recommended first line again in line with NICE recommendations and licensed indications.

Notes:

1. Propranolol 80mg-240mg daily in divided doses is the β -blocker of choice. Metoprolol at a dose of 100mg-200mg daily in divided doses is a suitable licensed alternative if propranolol cannot be tolerated.
2. Start at the lowest dose and build up gradually. Maintain the maximum tolerated dose for a minimum of 6 weeks before assessing. Discuss with patient at 6 months whether a gradual reduction and elimination of prophylactic medication might be considered.
3. Amitriptyline is useful with co-existent tension type headache, disturbed sleep, or depression.
4. Advise people with migraine that riboflavin (400 mg once a day) may be effective in reducing migraine frequency and intensity for some people. **This is not prescribable on the NHS as it is a food supplement. Patients should be advised to purchase this over the counter as a part of self-care.**
5. Sodium valproate [unlicensed indication] can also be considered in patients with episodic or chronic migraine. Start 150mg/day, increase by 150mg every 2 weeks to 600mg/day, max: 1200mg/day. **The MHRA/CHM have released important safety information on the use of antiepileptic drugs and the risk of suicidal thoughts and behavior. In addition, the MHRA has advised that sodium valproate must not be used in women of childbearing potential unless the conditions of the Pregnancy Prevention Programme are met and alternative treatments are ineffective or not tolerated; it must not be used during pregnancy for migraine prophylaxis.**
6. Note that gabapentin is not recommended by NICE for prophylactic treatment of migraine
7. Review the need for continuing migraine prophylaxis 6 months after the start of prophylactic treatment.

Topiramate

Topiramate is licensed for migraine prophylaxis in adults, and it is now recommended for use in the NICE headache clinical guideline.

The SPC (summary of product characteristics) will have full information on cautions, contraindications and side effects.

Place in therapy

This will be tailored to each patient, but as highlighted in the headache pathway, it should be considered when:

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- The frequency of migraines is such that regular prophylaxis is warranted
- Advise women of childbearing potential that topiramate is associated with a risk of foetal malformations and can impair the effectiveness of hormonal contraception. It is contraindicated in pregnancy and in women of childbearing potential if an effective method of contraception is not used.

Review

Continuing therapy should be reviewed every 6 months.

Titration Schedule

The dosage should then be increased in increments of 25 mg/day administered at 1-2 week intervals. If the patient is unable to tolerate the titration regimen, longer intervals between dose adjustments can be used.

Some patients may experience a benefit at a total daily dose of 50 mg/day. The recommended total daily dose of topiramate as treatment for the prophylaxis of migraine headache is 100 mg/day administered in two divided doses. No extra benefit has been shown from the administration of doses higher than 100 mg/day.

Useful Resources

These guidelines have been developed using NICE and BASH guidelines below

1. NICE Clinical Guideline CG150: Headaches in over 12's: diagnosis and management (September 2012, updated November 2015)

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg150>

2. NICE CKS: Migraine. Scenario: Migraine in pregnant or breastfeeding women (Last reviewed April 2019) <https://cks.nice.org.uk/migraine#!scenario:2>

3. The British Association for the Study of Headache (BASH)

<https://www.bash.org.uk/guidelines/>

4. The International Headache Society <http://ihs-classification.org/en/>

Self Help Resources

Patient UK – <https://patient.info/brain-nerves/headache-leaflet>

Migraine Trust - <http://www.migrainetrust.org/>

Organization for the understanding of cluster headaches - <http://www.ouchuk.org>

NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Headache/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Document control

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Lifestyle Changes for Migraine Sufferers

The main theme for the headache lifestyle is consistency. The SEEDS mnemonic describes five types of lifestyle changes that can reduce environmental triggers and help.

- **Sleep**
- **Exercise**
- **Eat (food & hydration)**
- **Diary**
- **Stress**

Sleep

Good sleep hygiene is very important for migraine sufferers

- Try to get a regular amount of sleep every day
- Do not drink caffeinated drinks close to bed time
- Do not use computers, tablets or smartphones at bed time

If insomnia is a problem you can find more information on:

- Patient.co.uk <https://patient.info/health/insomnia-poor-sleep>
- NHS choices <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/insomnia/>

Exercise

Try to do even a small amount of exercise at least five times a week. A brisk walk or yoga is sufficient if you are unable to do aerobic activities.

Eating and Drinking

- Try to eat regular meals
- Drink plenty of water and make sure you are not dehydrated
- Avoid caffeine completely or have a regular small amount daily (e.g., one or two cups of tea a day)
- Avoid foods that obviously trigger your migraine
- Excess alcohol can be a trigger in many people so reduce intake if necessary

Triggers are not the same for everyone. Often there is not one trigger but several factors that may have added to the likelihood of having a migraine.

Headache Diary

Keeping a headache diary is very important to see if there are any patterns to your migraines. This can be a paper diary or an online version. There are many headache/migraine apps available to record your information. Try to record information every day even if you don't have a migraine. The Migraine Trust has more information on keeping a diary and has a headache diary that you can download: [Keeping a headache diary - The Migraine Trust](#)

Stress Reduction

- Consider relaxation, yoga or mindfulness meditation.
- Cognitive behavioural therapy or psychological counselling may be of benefit.
- Explore whether there can be changes to your employment. Talk to your employer about your migraines to see if there is any help available.
- Contact the Migraine Trust for further help and advice regarding this: [The Migraine Trust Helpline - The Migraine Trust](#)

For further information

- Migraine Trust: www.migrainetrust.org
- Migraine - NHS (www.nhs.uk)
- "HeadsUp" Podcasts from National Migraine Centre
- Migraine World Summit: <https://migraineworldsummit.com>