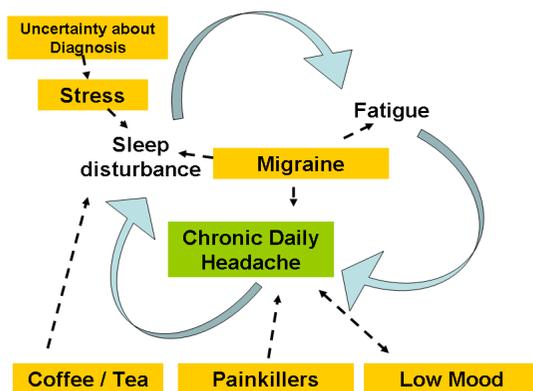


2. **A history of other 'chronic pain'.** Some people are prone to other chronic pain syndromes such as fibromyalgia (all over muscle pain), neck and back pain, abdominal pain and pelvic pain. There are complicated reasons why such a vulnerability can arise but it can be helpful to see a connection.
3. **Stress.** There does seem to be a link between stress and these sorts of headache. Stress makes this headache worse and the headache causes stress, both because its painful but also because it can be worrying. It is important to say that this is not a headache which is 'all in your mind' or 'psychological'. But looking at stress and how you are feeling can make a big difference to your headache.
4. **Using too many painkillers.** In recent years we have recognised that using painkillers such as codeine and paracetamol can actually make chronic daily headache worse. You have probably already discovered that regular painkillers only 'take the edge off' the pain and don't work well. In fact its worse than that, these painkillers often cause a 'rebound headache' when they wear off. Over time this can make the headache gradually worse

What can I do to help myself get better?

After a while many patients with chronic daily headache find they are in a **vicious circle of symptoms**



Look at the picture. Which of these things apply to you?

If you have had the headache for a long time it will take a long time to improve. These things may help:

- **Feeling confident about the diagnosis.** If you have ongoing doubts that the diagnosis is wrong then it will be hard to get better.
- **Stop regular analgesics.** Try as hard as you can to stop taking all regular painkillers. This includes ibuprofen, paracetamol and codeine. When you stop them your headache will normally get temporarily worse (for several weeks) before it improves. There are two ways of stopping the tablets.
 - Set a date to stop them (like stopping smoking).
 - Gradually wean yourself off them.

Stopping regular painkillers is not easy but can be a vital step on the road to recovery

- **Better migraine treatment**—if you do have migraine as part of your chronic daily headache there may be many different ways to improve it
- **Improve your sleep habits.** Go to bed at the same time every night. Avoid coffee, tea or coca cola after 6pm. Is your bed comfortable / too hot / cold?
- **Drug treatment**—so-called antidepressants such as amitryptiline can be helpful in these illnesses, even for people who are not feeling depressed. They are used in migraine and back pain as well. They are not addictive, like Valium or codeine. They work by promoting sleep and helping to chemically 'turn down' the 'volume knob'. When you first start them you may experience side effects which should settle after a couple of weeks
- **Look at stress/worry/mood.** If you are under stress or feeling down for other reasons then finding ways

Chronic Daily Headache is not 'all in the mind' but stress and worry can make it much worse

to solve this may also improve your headache

- **Other treatments.** Neck physiotherapy may sometimes be offered. Alternative treatments such as acupuncture and massage are unproven but can help some patients.

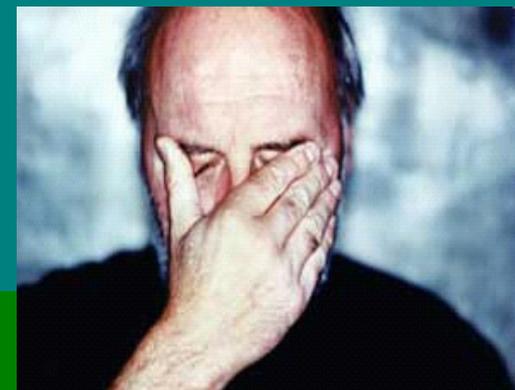
Where can I go for more information?

Links to all the major UK headache organisations can be found at www.headacheuk.org.

Authored by Dr Jon Stone, Consultant Neurologist September 2010

CHRONIC DAILY HEADACHE

A patient's guide



www.neurosymbols.org

Chronic Daily Headache

This leaflet aims to explain a bit about chronic daily headache and what it means.

Not all of it may apply to you and you should discuss it with the doctor who gave it to you



It is hard for others to understand how a headache can be so bad without any obvious cause

What is chronic daily headache ?

Chronic Daily Headache is the commonest type of headache that is referred to a neurology clinic.

It refers to a headache that is present most days, often for most of the day. Typically it has the following features:

- Constant 'pressing' or 'bursting' sensation, sometimes pounding
- Can be all over head, on one side or sometimes in a small area
- It is often variable but tends to get worse as the day goes on
- Conventional painkillers only 'take the edge' off the pain

Other symptoms associated with Chronic Daily Headache

Often headache is not the only symptom that people with Chronic Daily Headache have. Below are some common symptoms that can go along with chronic daily headache.

- Fatigue / Tiredness
- Blurred vision
- Back or Neck pain
- Nausea
- Poor concentration
- Avoidance of bright light
- Sleep disturbance (not enough or too much)
- Frustration, Anger
- Word finding difficulty
- Low mood
- Lack of enjoyment
- Worry

It doesn't sound like a proper diagnosis...

Its true that *Chronic Daily Headache* is not a very glamorous sounding diagnosis. But it is widely recognised one in neurology and by the International Headache Society. It has had many other names including:

- Chronic Tension Type Headache
- Muscle Contraction Headache

The trouble with these names is that we know you can have these sorts of headache without being 'tense' and they are not only due to 'muscle contraction'.

People with Chronic Daily Headache and migraine often think their Chronic daily headache is the worse of the two types. The name often doesn't do justice to the severity of the pain

Are you sure its not something else?

Chronic daily headache is a very distinctive clinical condition. Just as neurologists don't do a brain scan to diagnose migraine, it is usually not necessary to have a brain scan to diagnose *chronic daily headache*. This is particularly true if the headache has been going on for a few months.

Your doctor will have taken a careful history and performed a relevant examination. If they do not arrange a scan it is because they are confident about the diag-

nosis. They should have reassured you that there is not a sinister cause like a brain tumour. Remember that as neurologists we are the doctors who diagnose people with brain tumours as well so we know what that 'looks like'

I can't help thinking that it would be helpful to have a brain scan....

If you still feel concerned after a consultation, talk to your doctor about the pros and cons of having a CT Scan. Sometimes we will do this purely for *your own reassurance* (and not ours!)

Why has it happened?

Chronic Daily Headache is a complex phenomenon that has lots of different causes. Try thinking of the problem as a volume knob in your head that has been turned up too high.

As we understand more about the way pain works we know that there really are places in the nervous system, both in the nerve endings in the head and in the brain itself where this process of *sensitisation* and *amplification* of pain can occur.



Try thinking of the problem as a volume knob in your head which has been turned up too high and which you need to turn down

There are many potentially relevant factors:

1. **Migraine or other sorts of headache.** Patients with chronic daily headache very commonly also have migraine. When a series of migraines leads on to chronic daily headache it is sometimes called 'transformed migraine'. Sometimes it can be hard to tell whether the main problem is migraine or tension type headache.