Diagnosis and Treatment of Headache

Diagnosis Algorithm

10 Patient presents with complaint of a headache

11 Detailed History
- Characteristics of the headache
- Assess functional impairment
- Past medical history
- Family history of migraines
- Current medications (Rx and over-the-counter)
- Social history
- Review of systems - to rule out systemic illness

12 Causes for concern:
- Subacute and / or progressive headache over months
- New or different headache
- "Worst headache ever"
- Any headache of maximum severity at onset
- Onset after the age of 50 years old
- Symptoms of systemic illness
- Seizures
- Any neurological signs

13 Consider secondary headache disorder

14 Meets criteria for primary headache disorder?

15 Headaches other than primary headache
Out of guideline

16 Evaluate type of primary headache
Initiate patient education and lifestyle management

17 Migraine
(See Migraine algorithm)

18 Tension-type
(See Tension-type algorithm)

19 Cluster
(See Cluster algorithm)

20 Others
Out of guideline

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(See Migraine algorithm)

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(See Cluster algorithm)

20 Others
Out of guideline

Sinus Headache
Migraine-associated symptoms are often misdiagnosed as "sinus headache" by patients and providers. This has led to the underdiagnosis and treatment of migraine.

The International Headache Society (IHS) defines sinus headache by purulent nasal discharge, pathologic sinus finding by imaging, simultaneous onset of headache and sinusitis, and headache localized to specific facial and cranial areas of the sinuses.