

Chronic headache disorders – a systematic approach

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Background: Chronic headache disorders are defined as a headache that lasts at least 4 hours a day for at least 3 months on at least 50% of the days. Primary and secondary chronic headache disorders are differentiated. In the case of medication overuse, there is an overlap between primary and secondary chronic headache.

Results: The most important chronic headache disorder is chronic migraine. This can occur with and without medication overuse headache. The diagnosis chronic tension-type headache is separated from chronic migraine, both diagnoses cannot occur together. In addition, there are three more primary headache disorders fulfilling the criteria for chronic headache. These are hemicrania continua, nummular headache and new daily persistent headache. Diagnostic procedures such as magnetic resonance imaging or laboratory testings are only used to exclude secondary chronic headache disorders. In this presentation, the clinical features, the classification criteria and the treatment options will be presented.

Conclusion: Chronic headache is not an entity but comprises several types of primary and secondary headache disorders. The knowledge about the features and about the treatment procedures is mandatory for treating refractory chronic headache patients.