

Headache after ischemic stroke

Epidemiology

[Observational](#) studies indicate that 15 to 40% of patients with acute [ischemic stroke](#) report headache in close temporal relation to the event. The onset headache is more often seen in [posterior circulation strokes](#) than in strokes in other vascular territories. [Transient ischemic attacks](#) (TIA) can also lead to [headache](#). The pathophysiology of headache associated with acute ischemic stroke includes edema, hemorrhagic transformation, and changes in the trigeminovascular system ¹⁾.

The prevalence of [Headache](#) after [ischemic stroke](#) is high in [China](#). In addition, [women](#), presence of [midbrain lesions](#), [posterior circulation stroke](#) and a history of [migraine](#) were high-risk factors for ischemic stroke-related headaches ²⁾.

Diagnosis

The current diagnostic criteria of the ICHD-3 for acute headache attributed to ischemic stroke are based primarily on the opinion of experts rather than on published clinical evidence based on extensive case-control studies in patients with first-ever stroke. Diagnostic criteria for [sentinel headache](#) before ischemic stroke do not exist ³⁾

Treatment

No clinical trials on poststroke headache treatments were found in this review of the literature. While tricyclic antidepressants and anticonvulsants have been suggested for [central poststroke pain](#) syndrome, there is a regrettable lack of evidence supporting the use of daily medications aimed at reducing poststroke headache frequency. ⁴⁾

Better understanding of headache associated with ischemic stroke is needed to establish [ischemic stroke treatment guidelines](#) and inform patient [management](#) ⁵⁾

Outcome

Headache is common at the onset of or shortly following [ischemic stroke](#) and may contribute to poststroke [morbidity](#) ⁶⁾.

Factors associated with diagnostic process failures did not increase the odds of subsequent ischemic stroke/TIA hospitalization following ED headache ⁷⁾

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Diener HC, Katsarava Z, Weimar C. Headache associated with ischemic cerebrovascular disease. Rev

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Lebedeva ER, Ushenin AV, Gurary NM, Gilev DV, Olesen J. Diagnostic criteria for acute headache attributed to ischemic stroke and for sentinel headache before ischemic stroke. J Headache Pain. 2022 Jan 20;23(1):11. doi: 10.1186/s10194-021-01372-x. PMID: 35057731; PMCID: PMC8903596.

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Harriott AM, Karakaya F, Ayata C. Headache after ischemic stroke: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Neurology. 2020 Jan 7;94(1):e75-e86. doi: 10.1212/WNL.0000000000008591. Epub 2019 Nov 6. PMID: 31694924; PMCID: PMC7011689.

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