

Headache in Pregnancy

Headaches are generally divided into primary and secondary causes, of which there are a variety of pregnancy specific secondary causes. There are certain headaches that have a higher incidence at different stages of pregnancy.

<u>Primary</u>	<u>Secondary</u>
Migraine	Idiopathic intracranial hypertension
Cluster/Autonomic Headache	Meningitis
Tension Headache	Medication overuse headache
	Stroke
	Cerebral vein thrombosis
	Pre-eclampsia
	Posterior Reversible Encephalopathy Syndrome (PRES)
	Subarachnoid haemorrhage
	Reversible cerebral vasoconstriction syndrome
	Post-dural headache

Most Common In:

First Trimester	Postpartum
Third Trimester	Anytime

Red flag features of headache have been highlighted below; along with important elements of an assessment to aid the diagnostic process when reviewing a pregnant woman with the presenting complaint of headache.

Red Flag features of Headache:

- Description:
 - o Sudden onset or ‘Thunderclap’
 - o WORST headache ever
- Duration >48 hours
- Associated symptoms:
 - Fever Focal neurology
 - Seizure Photophobia
 - Diplopia Confusion/Altered GCS
 - Features of raised intracranial pressure
- Papilloedema
- Elevated blood pressure >140/90mmHg
- Excessive opiate use

A Thunderclap headache is a sudden onset headache that reaches peak intensity/pain within the **first FIVE minutes**

Useful resources:

[Acute care toolkit 15 ACT pregnancy Nov19 0 \(2\).pdf](#)

NHS Scotland National Maternity Network: ‘Management of Headache in Pregnancy’ [2023-02-21-headache-in-pregnancy.pdf \(scot.nhs.uk\)](#)

