

# Differences between common primary headache types

Typical headache feature	Tension-type headache	Migraine (with or without aura)	Cluster headache
Pain location (can be head, face or neck)	Bilateral	Unilateral or bilateral	Unilateral (around the eye, above the eye and along the side of the head or face)
Pain quality	Pressing or tightening (non-pulsating)	Pulsating (throbbing or banging in young people aged 12 to 17 years)	Variable (can be sharp, boring, burning, throbbing or tightening)
Pain intensity	Mild or moderate	Moderate or severe	Severe or very severe
Effect on activities	Not aggravated by routine activities of daily living	Aggravated by, or causes avoidance of, routine activities of daily living	Restlessness or agitation
Other symptoms	None	<p>Unusual sensitivity to light, sound or both, nausea, vomiting or both</p> <p>Symptoms of aura can occur with or without headache and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are fully reversible</li> <li>• develop over at least 5 minutes and</li> <li>• last 5 to 60 minutes</li> </ul> <p>Typical aura symptoms include visual symptoms (flickering lights, spots or lines and partial loss of vision), sensory symptoms (numbness and pins and needles) and speech disturbance</p>	<p>On the same side as the headache:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• red or watery eye</li> <li>• nasal congestion or runny nose</li> <li>• swollen eyelid</li> <li>• forehead and facial sweating</li> <li>• constricted pupil or drooping eyelid</li> </ul>
Duration	30 minutes to continuous	<p>4 to 72 hours in adults</p> <p>1 to 72 hours in young people aged 12 to 17 years</p>	15 to 180 minutes
Frequency	<p><b>Episodic tension-type headache:</b> Fewer than 15 days a month</p> <p><b>Chronic tension-type headache:</b> 15 or more days a month for more than 3 months (without medicine overuse)</p>	<p><b>Episodic migraine (with or without aura):</b> Fewer than 15 days a month</p> <p><b>Chronic migraine (with or without aura):</b> 15 or more days a month, for more than 3 months (without medicine overuse)</p>	<p><b>Episodic cluster headache:</b> From once every other day to 8 times a day with more than 3 months without pain in a 12-month period</p> <p><b>Chronic cluster headache:</b> From once every other day to 8 times a day with less than 3 months without pain in a 12-month period</p>

Chronic migraine and chronic tension-type headache often overlap. If there are any features of migraine, diagnose chronic migraine.

This table covers only part of the guideline content. For full details, see the [NICE clinical guideline on headaches in over 12s: diagnosis and management](#).