

**I. General Considerations**

- A. Be certain that it is not the environment that is causing the headache (e.g., carbon monoxide or other noxious fumes) and may endanger the rescuer.
  - B. Headaches that are sudden in onset, severe and especially those that are associated with an alteration of mental status or abnormal neurological exam, are most concerning.
  - C. Mental status may fluctuate and may deteriorate. Close observation and monitoring are required. Be prepared to treat seizures.
  - D. If several people have similar complaints, suspect an environmental cause.
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**II. History**

Perform a focused history and physical exam with particular attention to:

- A. Determine the onset, progression, duration and location of the headache.
  - B. Were there any preceding symptoms?
    - 1. Flashing lights or wavy lines
    - 2. Smells or sounds
    - 3. Fever, chills, cough
    - 4. Rash
    - 5. Sore throat
    - 6. Stiff neck
    - 7. Photophobia
  - C. Has the patient ever had headaches like this one before and how does this one compare?
  - D. Has there been any trauma to the head or falls?
  - E. Obtain the past medical history including history of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, alcohol or drug use, epilepsy and migraine headaches.
  - F. Is the patient taking any medications, especially aspirin or coumadin?
  - G. Has the patient experienced any difficulty in walking, moving the hands or arms, understanding you, seeing, or difficulty either in speaking or expressing thoughts?
  - H. Is the patient experiencing any other symptoms (e.g., chest pain, shortness of breath, etc.)?
  - I. If the patient is female, could she be pregnant?
  - J. Does the patient use illicit drugs?
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**III. Physical Examination**

- A. Perform an initial assessment.
- B. Perform a focused history and physical exam.
- C. Assess the level of consciousness.
- D. Assess the patient's neurological condition.
- E. Assess the surroundings:
  - 1. Check for pill bottles, syringes, etc.
  - 2. Note odor in the area, unvented heaters, etc.

**Paramedic**

- F. Assess the cardiac rhythm:
    - 1. Is it too fast or too slow?
    - 2. Is it regular or irregular?
    - 3. Is it a benign rhythm or not?
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IV. Treatment

**Basic**

- A. Establish an airway, maintain as indicated, suction as needed.
- B. Administer high concentration oxygen.

**Intermediate**

- C. Secure IV access.

**Paramedic**

- D. Assess and monitor the cardiac rhythm; treat arrhythmias/dysrhythmias per applicable protocols.
- E. Consider use of nitrous oxide or narcotic pain management of medical direction's choice.