

Problematic medication use in headache

Epidemiology and qualitative aspects of medication overuse
headache and non-adherence to prophylactic migraine treatment

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- I. Jonsson P, Hedenrud T, Linde M. Epidemiology of medication overuse headache in the general Swedish population. *Cephalalgia* (2011) 31(9):1015–22.
- II. Jonsson P, Linde M, Hensing G, Hedenrud T. Sociodemographic differences in medication use, health-care contacts and sickness absence among individuals with medication overuse headache. *The Journal of Headache and Pain* (2012) 13(4):281–90.
- III. Hedenrud T, Jonsson P, Linde M. Beliefs about medicines and adherence among Swedish migraineurs. *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy* (2008) 42(1):39–45.
- IV. Jonsson P, Jakobsson A, Hensing G, Linde M, Moore C. D, Hedenrud T. Holding on to the indispensable medication – A grounded theory on medication use from the perspective of persons with medication overuse headache (submitted).



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ABSTRACT

Aim: The aim was to analyze problematic medication use among persons with headache, focusing on overuse of acute medications, with subsequent medication overuse headache (MOH), and on underuse of prophylactic medication.

Methods: Data in Studies I and II came from a population survey in which 44 300 Swedes were interviewed by telephone about headache and medication use. In Study III, a questionnaire concerning adherence and beliefs about medicines was distributed to 174 consecutive migraine patients at a headache clinic. Study IV was a qualitative study, using grounded theory, in which 14 individual interviews were conducted with persons who fulfilled the diagnostic criteria for MOH.

Results: The prevalence of MOH in Sweden was 1.8% (95% C.I. 1.7–1.9). It was 2.8 times more common among women than among men and inversely associated with socioeconomic status. Fewer than half of those with MOH had made a headache-related visit to a physician during the previous year, and almost half used only over-the-counter (OTC) medications to treat their headaches. The proportion only using OTC medications was particularly high among the young. There were several differences indicating that the use of medications and the rate of health care contacts were unequal in relation to educational level. As for use of prophylactic medications, approximately one third of the migraineurs were considered non-adherent. The participants in the qualitative study perceived headaches as something that threatened to ruin their lives, and despite extensive efforts, they were unable to find any effective aid other than the acute medication. Because of this, the acute medication became indispensable to them.

Conclusion: Both overuse of acute medication and underuse of prophylactic medication are significant problems among persons with headache. Since both problems may lead to increased headaches, it is likely that many persons with headache carry an unnecessarily high disease burden.

Keywords: Headache, migraine, medication overuse headache, adherence, medication use, socioeconomic differences, beliefs about medicines, grounded theory

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