

# **HEADACHE AND ITS MATERIA MEDICA**

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Headache and Its Materia Medica by B. F. Underwood

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**B. F. UNDERWOOD**

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BY  
B. F. UNDERWOOD, M.D.

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MP

## HEADACHE.

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TO the habitual sufferer from headache, there is no other pain which at all compares with it ; the premonitory symptoms of a coming headache are replete with terror, and the suffering while it lasts is so severe that rather than endure its long continuance, death, and a cessation of pain, seems preferable. It may be doubted, if the discomfort and suffering from headache, although it be but one of the minor ills of life, does not in the aggregate exceed that from any other disease.

While in many, and perhaps in most cases, it is but a symptom, rather than a disease, yet to a certain extent headache constitutes of itself a disease, and is the principal, if not the only symptom of which complaint is made. The pathology of the cerebral lesions involved in headache is obscure ; the diagnosis difficult ; for hidden beneath its osseous encasement the morbid changes in the tissues of the brain or its functional derangement, except as revealed by the subjective symptoms of the patient, are as a sealed book. We can, however, recognize as underlying it, and as a prime factor in

its causation, a peculiar susceptibility of the nervous centers, which, under the stimulus of various disturbing influences, results in headache.

According to the exciting cause from which they spring, headaches may be classified in various divisions, of which the following are the best defined: 1, anæmic; 2, hyperæmic; 3, nervous; 4, reflex; 5, rheumatic; 6, toxic; 7, catarrhal.

**ANÆMIC HEADACHE.**—The first of these, the headache of anæmia, is properly symptomatic. It is produced whenever a sufficient supply of the red corpuscles of the blood are not passing through the capillaries of the brain. This condition may be due to an alteration in the quality of that fluid as in anæmia or leucocythæmia, where the number of corpuscles is reduced below the normal proportion; or while the blood may be normally constituted, the deficiency may be due to a weak action of the heart. The diagnostic symptoms of this variety of headache are such as would naturally arise from deficient cerebral circulation: There are spells of depression and lowness of spirits; with fearfulness and timidity. Dread of the future, of business or of other troubles, which are unfounded. The pain is usually of a dull, gnawing character, affecting the vertex, which is hot, and burning to the touch. It may also affect the forehead and temples and more rarely the occiput. It is accompanied with pallor of the face, and palpitation of the heart; and often

associated with dyspepsia and cardialgia; there is also coldness of the extremities, and in females there may be dysmenorrhœa. In some cases sleeplessness and in others drowsiness predominates. The organs of the special senses are disturbed, especially when loss of vital fluids has taken place, with ringing and buzzing noises in the ears, flashes of light before the eyes, and more rarely, illusions of smell. There may be also twitching of the muscles, dizziness and fainting. The digestion is often disturbed with nausea, furring of the tongue, flatulency and constipation. The eyes are sunken, the pupils dilated or in some cases contracted. The pulse is usually weak, labored and slow, or small, weak and rapid. In addition to the indicated remedy in this form of headache very much of the success in treatment will depend upon the diet and the surroundings. Change of scene and occupation, the securing of rest and quiet, may be absolutely necessary to effect a cure. If there are any drains upon the vital strength these will necessarily demand attention. A nutritious and restorative diet is also an important adjunct.

**HYPERÆMIC HEADACHE.**—This variety of headache, while the result of a directly opposite condition from that of anæmia, may be due to similar causes, such as prolonged thought and mental labor. Under the stress of severe mental exertion there is an increase in the amount of the arterial



blood sent to the brain, the cerebral vessels are dilated and this condition remains when the demand for the increased supply has ceased. The blood-vessels are distended and there is a corresponding pressure upon the substance of the brain. As the hyperæmia is active or passive, arterial or venous, there will be a corresponding difference in the symptoms. These will vary somewhat, at times sensation being most affected, at others the mental faculties. In the latter case the thoughts are rapid, disconnected and changeable, alternating from grave to gay, and at times becoming maniacal. The ideas are confused, false and distorted. The entire head is usually affected with sensation of pressure and throbbing. There are illusions of the special senses from the irritation of the nervous centers, with extreme sensitiveness to noise of every kind; light is unpleasant and aggravates the suffering. The eyes and face are suffused and there is strong pulsation in the carotids. The face is sometimes intensely red with heat in the brow and vertex. In some cases there is intense suffering, hyperæsthesia and violent pains.

When the headache is the result of severe mental application, anxiety or over-indulgence in rich food, or stimulants, a change in the habits is the first step toward a cure. Rest and moderation in living should be insisted upon and attention paid to the diet. A light diet, fish, white meat, fruits and vege-

tables should be substituted in the place of the more nitrogenous foods and all wines and liquors should be avoided.

**NERVOUS HEADACHE.**—This form of headache is due to a morbid change of the nervous centers, a peculiar functional disorder which is paroxysmal and not continuous, and which is often inherited. To the paroxysms which are similar to those which result in neuralgia, epilepsy, etc., Dr. Edward Liveing has given the name of "Nerve Storms." "This consists in a tendency on the part of the nervous centres to the irregular accumulation and discharge of nervous force, to disrupted and unco-ordinated action, in fact; and the concentration of this tendency in particular localities, or about particular foci, will mainly determine the neurosis in question." [Quoted by Day.] In case the general health has been reduced the attacks become more frequent and severe, the controlling influence which holds this tendency to morbid irregularity of action in check is weakened and the abnormal disposition has full sway. Under such circumstances the slightest irregularity of living will suffice to bring on an attack, fatigue, worry, excitement or indulgence at the table often being a sufficient provocative. The headache is ushered in by various premonitory symptoms which may precede the attack by a period varying from a few hours to several days, during which time there is a sense of general

uneasiness and discomfort, pressure in the head, vertigo, ringing in the ears, spots before the eyes, chilliness, malaise and yawning. The pain is usually intense and is located in the forehead and vertex, but may attack any portion of the head or the back of the neck. After continuing for some time it often settles in one temple or in one eye or in one side of the head. Associated with these headaches we often find disturbance of the digestion, nervous irritability and disquietude. The pulse is generally undisturbed even during the most severe paroxysms, although in some cases it is feeble and small. The pupils are usually contracted and the extremities cold with a sensation of heat in the head.

**HEMICRANIA.**—This is a severe form of nervous headache due to vaso-motor disturbance, or associated with vaso-motor symptoms. The pain is felt most in the anterior frontal region, it is generally of a continuous character, not intermittent, and may increase to great intensity. Special painful points, such as are often present in neuralgia, are usually absent, but the skin over all of the affected part is generally hyperæsthetic. The malaise of the premonitory period continues, the sufferer has no appetite, there is often nausea and extreme sensitiveness to external impressions.

According to M. Hervez (*Practitioner*), "Hemicrania is an arterial neurosis which takes its origin