

16 Headache

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Headache is among the most common reasons patients seek medical attention and is responsible, on a global basis, for more disability than any other neurologic problem. Diagnosis and management are based on a careful clinical approach augmented by an understanding of the anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology of the nervous system pathways mediating the various headache syndromes. This chapter will focus on the general approach to a patient with headache; migraine and other primary headache disorders are discussed in **Chap. 430**.

■ GENERAL PRINCIPLES

A classification system developed by the International Headache Society (www.ihs-headache.org/en/resources/guidelines/) characterizes headache as primary or secondary (**Table 16-1**). *Primary headaches* are those in which headache and its associated features are the disorder itself, whereas *secondary headaches* are those caused by exogenous disorders (Headache Classification Committee of the International Headache Society, 2018). Primary headache often results in considerable disability and a decrease in the patient's quality of life. Mild secondary headache, such as that seen in association with upper respiratory tract infections, is common but rarely worrisome. Life-threatening headache is relatively uncommon, but vigilance is required in order to recognize and appropriately treat such patients.

TABLE 16-1 Common Causes of Headache