



2024 INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

SPEAKER

Deborah Friedman, MD,
MPH, FAAN, FAHS

TOPIC

When Headache Starts Behind the Eyes

TITLE & ORGANIZATION

Neuro-Ophthalmologist &
Headache Specialist
Dallas, Texas

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Tension-type headache is the most common type of headache. It produces pain on both sides, usually on the forehead. Migraine pain is typically felt on one side and often behind the eye.
- New-onset, or acute, or extreme pain or vision loss requires immediate medical attention.
- Additional symptoms like redness of the eye, vision loss, double vision, or severe and out-of-the-ordinary pain also warrant urgent care or emergency room assistance.
- Pain behind the eyes can be caused by various conditions, some of which are rare. It is not necessarily caused by inflammation of the optic nerve but is likely due to structures innervated by the trigeminal nerve.
- Cluster headache and migraine attacks can cause pain behind the eyes, but the pain can be alleviated with acute treatments for migraine pain.
- Hemicrania continua is a primary headache disorder that causes pain on one side of the head that can wax and wane but is continuous. It can also affect the eye area.
- Primary stabbing headache is a type of headache that can cause brief but severe pain, including in the eye area.
- Other conditions that may cause pain behind the eyes include aneurysms, tumors, increased pressure in the brain, arterial dissection, and a tear in the carotid artery.
- Vision difficulties, such as squinting, can be prodrome symptoms of a migraine attack.
- Some commonly used migraine medications, such as tricyclic antidepressants, can cause dry eye, which can be painful.

TREATMENTS CITED

Acetaminophen	Topiramate (Topamax)
Anti-inflammatories	Tricyclic antidepressants

QUOTES

"The cornea — that clear part in the front of the eye — is the most densely innervated structure in the body. One little speck of dust right in your cornea, and it hurts like crazy."

"Sinus disease or sinus infections are one of the causes of pain behind the eyes. Typically, it's aching pain, and usually it's on both sides. But usually again, it's associated with pain over the sinuses. So it would be unusual for people to get mostly just eye pain from a sinus condition."

"Blurred vision can sometimes be mistaken [for] or called a migraine aura, but it's not a migraine aura because migraine aura comes from the brain; it comes from the back of the brain. There's no place in the brain that can be disturbed that causes blurred vision. You can get vision loss, but not blurred vision, out-of-focus vision. Probably the changes that cause blurred vision and migraine come from the cornea or from the cornea related to the tear film."

"In my opinion, eye strain is sort of overly blamed for headache."

"There is no such thing [as ocular migraine]. People also call it 'eye migraine.' Again, there's no real diagnosis called 'eye migraine' or 'eye headache.' Some people refer to their cluster headaches as eye headaches, but you have to kind of take the whole history and tease out what's going on to really get an appropriate diagnosis."

PRACTICAL STEPS

- If you have pain behind the eyes — or wake up with pain behind your eye — but no other headache symptoms, try treating it with an anti-inflammatory or acetaminophen.
- If you experience new acute extreme pain or vision loss, seek immediate medical attention to rule out a more serious condition.