

# Is Abdominal Pain a Feature of Adult Migraine?

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Recurrent abdominal pain in children, frequently diagnosed as "abdominal migraine," is thought to evolve into more typical migraine headache during the teens and twenties. If this transformation occurred, we would expect some adult migraineurs to retain abdominal pain; but we could not recall this symptom being mentioned by patients. However, without direct questioning the absence cannot be assumed. We, therefore, asked 100 migraineurs about abdominal symptoms during migraine attacks: only one experienced unexplained abdominal pain. We conclude that abdominal pain is not a feature in adult migraineurs, leading us to support the notions that: (1) recurrent abdominal pain of childhood has a number of causes; (2) abdominal migraine may be an incorrect attribution and is liable to be over diagnosed; (3) abdominal migraine requires more precise definition; (4) the transition from childhood abdominal migraine to adult migraine needs precise prospective study.

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It is currently assumed that abdominal migraine is an entity affecting children who have periodic abdominal pain without cranial symptoms. These abdominal symptoms are thought to metamorphose into episodic headache accompanied by photophobia, nausea and vomiting, with loss of abdominal pain in adulthood. If correct, then one would expect some adults to experience abdominal pain during their attacks. Because we could not recall adults complaining of pain during migraine episodes, we decided to study this aspect in adult migraineurs.

## METHODS

We asked 100 patients (24 men and 76 women; 32 classical migraine<sup>1</sup> and 68 common migraine) attending The City of London Migraine Clinic or other neurological outpatient clinics about abdominal symptoms and specifically about pain ex-

<sup>1</sup> A diagnosis of classical migraine includes attacks of common and classical.

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perienced during migraine attacks, and how the pain related to other migraine symptoms.

## RESULTS

Patients aged between 23 and 68 years (median 42 years) had migraine between 1 and 60 years (median 23 years). All experienced gastrointestinal symptoms during the headache phase of migraine attacks: 5 anorexia alone; 23 nausea alone; 69 nausea with vomiting in some attacks; 3 had nausea and diarrhea. Only 14 patients had abdominal pain or discomfort, 10 being related to vomiting (Table). One patient reported relief from recurrent abdominal pain during migraine attacks—for several years she had noticed spasm in her bowel every morning associated with tenderness, but not with constipation. These symptoms were not present during migraine attacks.

## COMMENTS

With only one patient out of one hundred having unexplained lower abdominal pain, we conclude that abdominal pain per se is not a primary feature of migraine in adult migraineurs unless secondary to vomiting, altered large bowel frequency, or rectal tenesmus. Further, we have not heard patients spontaneously complain of abdominal pain during their migraine attacks, but until this study we had not asked. Neither did we ask about symptoms of recurrent abdominal pain in childhood because memory for past events can be in-

Reports of Abdominal Symptoms (n=100)

Symptom	No.
No abdominal pain	86
Epigastric pain strictly related to vomiting	9
Left iliac fossa discomfort only during vomiting	1
Lower abdominal pain	
Alone	1
With diarrhea	1
With constipation	1
Occasional tenesmus	1