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## What causes head pressure and brain fog?

A [poster to one of our forums](#), Recoverandheal, has a two-and-a-half-year history of mild pressure in the head and what he describes as 'brain fog'. He experiences a 'constant cloud' over his brain and never has any mental clarity or a clear head. He has a number of other symptoms including poor short-term memory, detachment from reality, sharp pains in the head and noises in the ears. He suffers from anxiety, made worse or caused by the symptoms.

### Brain fog

I know exactly what Recoverandheal means by 'brain fog'. It is the first symptom I get when I have [flu](#) and it is most frustrating as it stops me working. Fortunately, it clears up after a few days. I can't imagine what it must be like to have it for two and a half years.

*"I have a mild pressure feeling in the head, it's not painful but it is just very aggravating and feels really strange. I also have extreme brain fog. It feels as if there is a constant cloud over my brain and I never have any mental clarity."*

Source: Recoverandheal

The first approach would be to make sure this was not a secondary [headache](#) - in other words, a headache with an identifiable cause. Some of these are more serious than others and would include [giant cell arteritis](#) (an inflammation of the arteries that run along the temples), raised blood pressure ([hypertension](#)), [brain haemorrhage](#), brain infections (eg, [encephalitis](#)), raised pressure in the fluid of the brain (raised intracranial pressure) and, of course, [brain tumours](#).

Less serious causes (from the point of view of outlook) include [carbon monoxide poisoning](#), taking too many painkillers ([medication-overuse headache](#)), disorders of the joints of the jaw ([temporomandibular joint disorders](#)), dental problems and sinus infections ([sinusitis](#)).

## Trial and error

Recoverandheal and other forum readers have offered their own theories, based on their own knowledge and experiences. They have raised the possibility of [epilepsy](#), overactive parathyroid glands ([hyperparathyroidism](#)), overactive thyroid gland ([thyrotoxicosis](#)) and disorders of the brain circulation. A user called rob 98066 suggests it could be a [vitamin B12 deficiency](#).

*"Get your vitamins B12 checked. That would explain most of the symptoms."*

Source: rob 98066

Fortunately the original poster has had a wide range of investigations including CT and MRI brain scans, a heart tracing, EEG and blood tests, which have ruled out many of these conditions.

Some disorders require specific tests which I can't see Recoverandheal has yet had and it would be worth getting these done. These include tests for [lupus](#) (an inflammatory disorder), magnesium deficiency, [zinc deficiency](#), [Lyme disease](#) (infection resulting from a tick bite) and [postural tachycardia syndrome](#) (increase in heart rate on standing). I also think detailed examination and investigation of his neck (cervical spine) would be worth pursuing.

If all these tests are normal, one would be thinking in terms of primary headache (without an underlying secondary cause). Primary headaches are diagnosed in 9 out of 10 cases of headache. Common types include [tension-type headache](#), [migraine](#), and daily persistent headache. Diagnosis depends on the pattern of symptoms and investigations to rule out underlying causes. Whilst there are specific therapies for some primary headaches (migraine being a notable example), in many cases, treatment is a trial and error affair.

# Medically unexplained

Sometimes, despite the best efforts of the medical profession and a comprehensive battery of investigations, people are left without any explanation for their symptoms. Doctors (who love to label things) have a name even for this situation - '[medically unexplained symptoms](#)' (MUS). This means exactly what it says on the tin - no one is denying that the person has the symptoms; it's simply that doctors have been unable to find a medical condition to explain them.

Some people with MUS undoubtedly do have stress/anxiety, whether as a result of the symptoms or as a cause of them. I would encourage the poster to continue to pursue psychological support, as this may help to relieve a potential cause as well as helping him cope with the symptoms. [Cognitive behavioural therapy](#) would be ideal for this purpose, as would [mindful awareness](#) - a technique which would arm him with a way of deflecting his mind away from his troubling symptoms.

## Visit our forums

Head over to Patient's forums to seek support and advice from our friendly community.

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