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Conquering Post-Dural Puncture Headache: A Systematic Review of Effective Treatments

1. **Cezary Kopczyński**
   ORCiD: 0009-0005-2620-4874
   e-mail: koperos13@gmail.com
   Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland

2. **Urszula Kopczyńska**
   ORCiD: 0009-0009-7443-5975
   e-mail: piaseckaula@wp.pl
   Powiatowe Centrum Medyczne w Grójcu, Piotra Skargi 10, 05-600 Grójec, Poland

3. **Piotr Malinowski**
   ORCiD: 0009-0002-9835-6621
   e-mail: piotrmalinowski13@gmail.com
   Mazowiecki Szpital Bródnowski, Ludwika Kondratowicza 8, 03-242 Warsaw, Poland

4. **Piotr Sikorski**
   ORCiD: 0000-0003-1629-2784
   e-mail: sikorski_piotr@icloud.com
   Mazowiecki Szpital Bródnowski, Ludwika Kondratowicza 8, 03-242 Warsaw, Poland

5. **Kinga Gurdak**
   ORCiD: 0009-0009-1474-9630
   e-mail: kingagurdak@gmail.com
   Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland

6. **Martyna Dydyk**
ORCiD: 0009-0005-5906-3406
e-mail: dydykm@icloud.com
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland

7. **Martyna Dyrek**
ORCiD: 0009-0000-6182-7835
e-mail: m.dyrekk@gmail.com
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland

8. **Ewa Błaszczak**
ORCiD: 0009-0003-5173-5285
e-mail: ewblaszczak@gmail.com
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland

9. **Jakub Wójcik**
ORCiD: 0009-0001-9732-9632
e-mail: jm_wojcik@icloud.com
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland

10. **Aleksandra Partyka**
ORCiD: 0009-0000-6583-1110
e-mail: partykaola1@gmail.com
Medical University of Warsaw, Żwirki i Wigury 61, 02-091 Warsaw, Poland

Abstract
Post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) is a common complication following spinal procedures, particularly lumbar punctures and epidural anesthesia. This systematic review aims to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of various management strategies for PDPH. A comprehensive search was conducted across major databases for relevant articles published up to January 2024. The inclusion criteria comprised studies assessing interventions for post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) management in adult populations. Data extraction and quality evaluation were conducted independently by two reviewers. Analysis involved 34 studies meeting the inclusion criteria. The results indicate that conservative approaches, including bed rest, hydration, caffeine, and analgesics, continue to serve as the fundamental components of PDPH management. Additionally, epidural blood patch (EBP) emerged as the most effective intervention for refractory cases. However, further research is needed to optimize treatment protocols and explore emerging therapies.

Keywords: post-dural puncture headache, epidural blood patch, lumbar puncture, PDPH

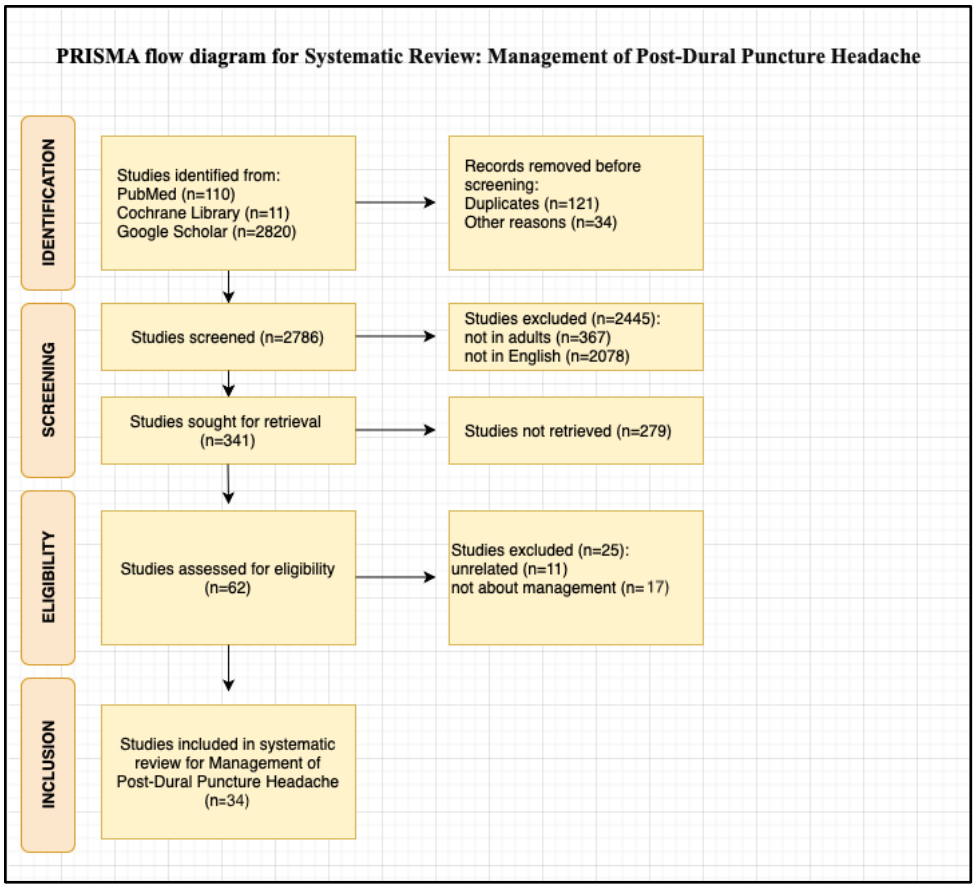
Introduction

Post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) is a distressing complication associated with spinal procedures, characterized by severe positional headache, nausea, vomiting, photophobia, and other neurological symptoms. Despite progress in procedural methodologies, the occurrence of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) persists notably, especially subsequent to lumbar punctures and epidural anesthesia. Addressing PDPH presents clinicians with substantial challenges, given its adverse effects on patients' well-being and the potential for extended hospitalization periods. This systematic review aims to offer an exhaustive examination of existing evidence concerning management approaches for PDPH, encompassing conservative strategies to more invasive interventions.

Methods

A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple databases, including PubMed, Cochrane Library, and Google Scholar, to identify relevant articles published until January 2024. The search strategy encompassed keywords related to post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) and a spectrum of management interventions, spanning conservative approaches, pharmacological therapies, and invasive procedures. Inclusion criteria encompassed studies evaluating interventions for PDPH management in adults, with eligible study designs comprising randomized controlled trials (RCTs), cohort studies, and systematic reviews. Exclusion criteria involved studies centered on pediatric populations or those published in languages other than English.

Two reviewers autonomously evaluated the titles and abstracts of retrieved articles to determine eligibility. Subsequently, full-text articles of potentially pertinent studies underwent scrutiny for inclusion. Data extraction was carried out utilizing a standardized template, encompassing study particulars, intervention specifications, outcomes, and adverse events. Risk of bias appraisal was conducted utilizing suitable methodologies (e.g., Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool for RCTs).



Results

A total of 34 studies were included in the systematic review after screening and eligibility assessment. The majority of studies were RCTs, while some were cohort studies or systematic reviews/meta-analyses. The included studies evaluated various interventions for PDPH management, encompassing conservative measures, pharmacological treatments, and invasive procedures.

Conservative measures

To begin, it is advised to routinely employ atraumatic spinal needles for lumbar puncture (1, 2). Secondly, when employing a cutting needle for lumbar puncture, utilizing a narrower-gauge needle is recommended to mitigate the risk of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) (3). Conservative measures such as bed rest (4), hydration, caffeine (5, 6), and analgesics were commonly assessed across studies (3, 7). These interventions were found to provide symptomatic relief in mild to moderate cases of PDPH. Bed rest, in particular, was often recommended to allow for spontaneous closure of the dural puncture site and reabsorption of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF).

Hydration was deemed essential to maintain intravascular volume and optimize CSF dynamics. Caffeine, through its vasoconstrictive properties, was suggested to alleviate symptoms by reducing cerebral vasodilation. However, oral ingestion of caffeine resulted in a higher incidence of insomnia among participants compared to those who received a placebo (6).

Pharmacological treatments

Pharmacological treatments constituted another significant aspect of PDPH management. NSAIDs were frequently used due to their analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties. Acetaminophen was considered a safe alternative, particularly in patients with contraindications to NSAIDs or opioids. As for opioids, certain studies have demonstrated that morphine does not diminish the occurrence of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH), and opioids do not reduce the utilization of epidural blood patch (EBP). Likewise, the use of fentanyl does not reduce the occurrence of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) (8). Moreover, antiemetics like metoclopramide and promethazine are prescribed to alleviate nausea and vomiting associated with PDPH. Additionally, ondansetron may potentially decrease the probability of experiencing PDPH (9). A study suggests that intravenous administration of mannitol may result in a quicker and more immediate relief from post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) when compared to acetaminophen-caffeine capsules. Mannitol presents as a promising intervention with the potential for enhanced efficacy in managing PDPH (10). Various clinical studies have examined the effects of intravenous aminophylline on PDPH (11). However, research suggests that co-administration of aminophylline and dexamethasone leads to a notably superior reduction in PDPH compared to using either drug alone, particularly observed in patients undergoing lower extremity surgery under spinal anesthesia (12).

Both pregabalin and gabapentin also demonstrate utility and safety in the management of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH), with pregabalin exhibiting greater efficacy in this context (13). Intravenous administration of mannitol, hydrocortisone or a combination of neostigmine and atropine have shown favorable outcomes. However, the effectiveness of neuraxial morphine or epidural dexamethasone for preventing post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) remains uncertain (14, 15). Nebulized dexmedetomidine demonstrated efficacy in significantly reducing symptoms and pain scores associated with post-dural puncture headache (PDPH). Conversely, nebulization with fentanyl did not yield relief from PDPH symptoms compared to the control group (7). Tetracosactide presents a potential non-invasive alternative to blood patch for the treatment of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH), although further research is warranted to elucidate its efficacy and safety profile (16).

Invasive interventions

Epidural blood patch (EBP) emerged as a highly effective intervention for refractory cases of PDPH (17). EBP involves the injection of autologous blood into the epidural space, sealing the dural puncture site and restoring CSF pressure. Multiple studies demonstrated significant improvement in headache severity and resolution of symptoms following EBP. The procedure was generally well-tolerated, with transient back pain being the most common adverse event. However, concerns regarding the risk of infectious complications and inadvertent dural puncture during the procedure were noted (18, 19, 20).

Moreover, substantial gaps in knowledge persist regarding critical research questions, such as the optimal timing for implementing an epidural blood patch (21). Over the extended term, patients who undergo an epidural blood patch (EBP) for the management of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) subsequent to lumbar puncture (LP) do not exhibit a higher propensity for developing chronic headaches compared to individuals who do not undergo an EBP (22).

When conservative management fails to alleviate post-dural puncture headache (PDPH), transnasal sphenopalatine ganglion block (SPGB) represents an effective therapeutic option. This noninvasive approach is characterized by its safety, tolerability, simplicity, and minimal risk of complications (23). The data indicated that prompt administration of sphenopalatine ganglion block (SPGB) diminishes hospitalization duration and recurrence of symptoms, potentially facilitating an expedited return to daily activities and lowering overall healthcare expenses (24). The sphenopalatine ganglion (SPG) block emerges as a viable and efficacious intervention for patients afflicted with post-dural puncture headache (PDPH). Its implementation substantially diminishes the necessity for epidural blood patch intervention. The procedure's procedural safety profile, coupled with its capacity for prompt and enduring pain alleviation, positions SPG block as an advancing therapeutic modality in the management of PDPH (25). Consequently, sphenopalatine ganglion block (SPGB) serves as an efficacious primary approach for addressing severe headache in individuals afflicted with post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) (26). Low to moderate quality evidence indicates that SPG block may offer better short-term pain relief for post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) compared to conservative treatment and the use of lignocaine spray (27). Additionally, alternative peripheral nerve blocks may be contemplated as analgesic modalities in the treatment of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) (28). A therapeutic efficacy of greater occipital nerve block in alleviating postdural puncture headache (PDPH) shows promising results (29). However, further extensive studies are needed to assess its therapeutic potential beyond the acute phase (30). While the majority of retrospective studies have shown the efficacy of sphenopalatine ganglion block in mitigating post-dural puncture headache (PDPH), there are instances where it failed to provide substantial therapeutic benefits compared to conventional methods (31).

The placement of an intrathecal catheter is another solution in management of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH). Inadvertent dural puncture frequently occurs as a complication during labor analgesia procedures. This occurrence may lead to the development of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH), resulting in heightened morbidity and escalated healthcare expenses. The placement of an intrathecal catheter serves as a preventive measure, effectively mitigating the occurrence and severity of post-dural puncture headache (32). However, this solution might be considered more of a preventive measure than a treatment itself.

Other invasive interventions, such as epidural saline infusion, epidural fibrin glue (33), and epidural hydroxyethyl starch injection (34), showed promising results in some studies but lacked robust evidence or consensus regarding their efficacy and safety profiles.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the management of post-dural puncture headache (PDPH) encompasses a range of interventions aimed at providing symptomatic relief and restoring normal cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) dynamics. Conservative measures, including bed rest, hydration, caffeine, and analgesics, remain the initial approach for mild to moderate cases of PDPH.

Pharmacological treatments, such as NSAIDs, acetaminophen, opioids, and antiemetics, offer additional support in symptom management, although their efficacy and safety profiles should be carefully considered.

Epidural blood patch (EBP) stands out as the most effective intervention for refractory PDPH, demonstrating significant improvement in headache severity and symptom resolution.

Despite its effectiveness, EBP is not without risks, including transient back pain and potential infectious complications. Our review underscores the growing prominence of transnasal sphenopalatine ganglion block (SPGB) as a noninvasive and effective therapeutic option for patients with refractory PDPH. Notably, SPGB offers a favorable safety profile, ease of administration, and minimal risk of complications, making it an appealing choice in clinical practice. Further research is warranted to optimize treatment protocols, evaluate emerging therapies, and address gaps in current evidence to improve outcomes for individuals experiencing PDPH. Multidisciplinary collaboration and standardized guidelines are essential to enhance the management of this common complication and minimize its impact on patients' well-being.

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