

# NEURORADIOLOGICAL FINDINGS WITH CONVENTIONAL AND ADVANCED MRI TECHNIQUES IN SECONDARY HEADACHES

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## Abstract

Headache is one of the most common clinical entities that neurologists are confronted with in clinical practice and is associated with a wide spectrum of differential diagnoses. The International Classification of Headache Disorders, 3rd edition (ICHD-III) classifies headache in two main categories: primary headache in the absence of underlying disorder and secondary headache which is attributed to underlying systemic or neurological disease. The classification of headache warrants a detailed patient history and clinical examination, as well as complementary neuroradiological studies, especially when "red flags" point towards secondary headache types that may require therapeutic interventions. The main causes of secondary headache include infections, neuroinflammatory disorders, brain neoplasms, cerebrovascular diseases, and alterations of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) dynamics. Computed Tomography (CT) studies are primarily used for the acute differential diagnosis of headache, for example in patients presenting with "thunderclap-headache" when subarachnoid haemorrhage is suspected. In the sub-acute setting, however, Magnetic Resonance imaging (MRI) studies are far more sensitive for the delineation of underlying brain pathologies. Besides the use of conventional MRI, advanced MRI techniques, including diffusion imaging, perfusion, spectroscopy and functional MRI, facilitate the early diagnosis of underlying functional, structural, and metabolic changes, while they may be also utilized for treatment monitoring in patients with secondary headaches. In the present review, the most commonly encountered secondary headaches along with associated neuroradiological findings will be presented, focusing on conventional and advanced MRI techniques.

**Key words:** Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), secondary headache, advanced MRI techniques, neuroradiology

## ΝΕΥΡΟΑΚΤΙΝΟΛΟΓΙΚΑ ΕΥΡΗΜΑΤΑ ΜΕ ΣΥΜΒΑΤΙΚΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΡΟΗΓΜΕΝΕΣ ΤΕΧΝΙΚΕΣ ΑΠΕΙΚΟΝΙΣΗΣ ΜΑΓΝΗΤΙΚΟΥ ΣΥΝΤΟΝΙΣΜΟΥ ΣΤΙΣ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΟΠΑΘΕΙΣ ΚΕΦΑΛΑΛΓΙΕΣ

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## Περίληψη

Η κεφαλαλγία είναι ένα από τα συχνότερα συμπτώματα που καλούνται να αξιολογήσουν οι νευρολόγοι στην κλινική πράξη και σχετίζεται με ένα ευρύ φάσμα διαφορικής διάγνωσης. Η Διεθνής Ταξινόμηση Διατα-

ραχών Κεφαλαλγίας, 3<sup>η</sup> έκδοση (ICHD-III) ταξινομεί την κεφαλαλγία σε δύο κύριες κατηγορίες: πρωτοπαθή κεφαλαλγία απουσία υποκείμενης διαταραχής και δευτεροπαθή κεφαλαλγία που αποδίδεται σε υποκείμενη συστηματική ή νευρολογική νόσο. Η ταξινόμηση της κεφαλαλγίας απαιτεί λήψη λεπτομερούς ιστορικού και ενδελεχή κλινική εξέταση του ασθενούς, καθώς και συμπληρωματική νευροακτινολογική μελέτη, ειδικά όταν συνυπάρχουν ευρήματα που υποδεικνύουν την παρουσία υποκείμενης νόσου που πιθανώς απαιτεί άμεση θεραπευτική παρέμβαση. Οι κύριες αιτίες της δευτεροπαθούς κεφαλαλγίας περιλαμβάνουν λοιμώξεις, φλεγμονώδεις διαταραχές του κεντρικού νευρικού συστήματος, νεοπλασμάτα του εγκεφάλου, αγγειακές παθήσεις και μεταβολές της δυναμικής της ροής του εγκεφαλονωτιαίου υγρού (ΕΝΥ). Η διενέργεια υπολογιστικής τομογραφίας (CT) πραγματοποιείται κυρίως σε οξεία φάση, για τη διαφορική διάγνωση της κεφαλαλγίας, επί παραδείγματι σε ασθενείς που εμφανίζουν «κεραυνοβόλο-κεφαλαλγία» και στους οποίους τίθεται η υπόνοια υπαραχνοειδούς αιμορραγίας. Ωστόσο, στην υποξεία φάση, η Απεικόνιση Μαγνητικού Συντονισμού (MRI) έχει μεγαλύτερη ευαισθησία στην αναγνώριση και λεπτομερή αξιολόγηση υποκείμενων αλλοιώσεων του εγκεφάλου. Η συνδυαστική εφαρμογή των συμβατικών τεχνικών Απεικόνισης Μαγνητικού Συντονισμού και των προηγμένων τεχνικών νευροαπεικόνισης, συμπεριλαμβανομένης της απεικόνισης ταυστή διάχυσης, της αιματικής διήθησης πρώτης διόδου, της φασματοσκοπίας και της λειτουργικής Απεικόνισης Μαγνητικού Συντονισμού, διευκολύνει την έγκαιρη διάγνωση και αξιολόγηση μορφολογικών, λειτουργικών και μεταβολικών αλλαγών, όπως επίσης και την παρακολούθηση της θεραπείας ασθενών με δευτεροπαθή κεφαλαλγία. Στην παρούσα ανασκόπηση θα παρουσιαστούν τα συχνότερα αίτια δευτεροπαθούς κεφαλαλγίας και τα νευροακτινολογικά τους ευρήματα, εστιάζοντας κυρίως στις συμβατικές και προηγμένες τεχνικές MRI.

**Λέξεις ευρητηρίου:** Απεικόνιση Μαγνητικού Συντονισμού (MRI) εγκεφάλου, δευτεροπαθής κεφαλαλγία, προηγμένες τεχνικές απεικόνισης Μαγνητικού Συντονισμού, Νευροακτινολογία

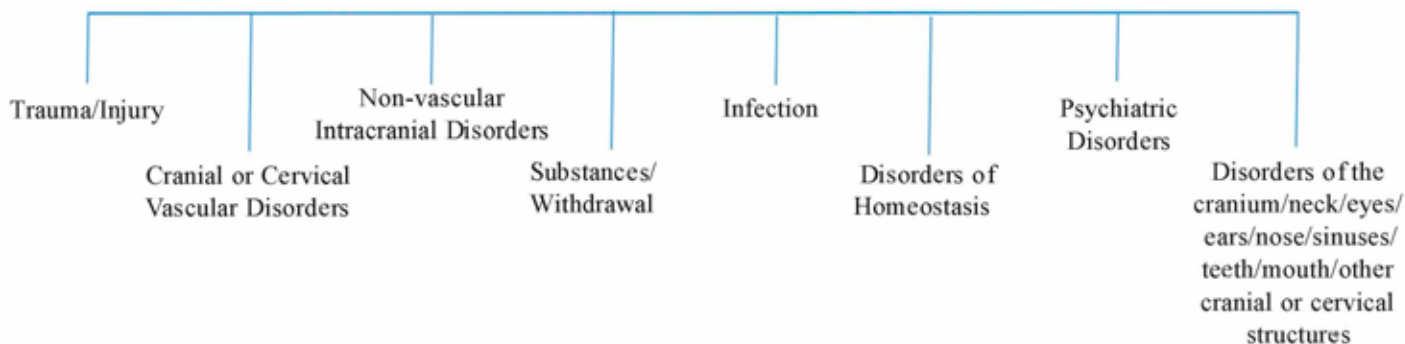
## Introduction

Headache is one of the most common symptoms that a patient will experience during his lifetime and one of the most frequent disabling diseases worldwide [1]. According to the International Classification of Headache Disorders (ICHD-III) [2], headache can be classified in primary and secondary headache, with the latter being attributed to underlying causal factors, including infections, neuroinflammatory disorders, brain neoplasms, cerebrovascular diseases, and alterations of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) dynamics (Figure 1). The differential diagnosis between primary and secondary headache warrants thorough neurological examination, as well as the acquisition of a detailed patient history. If the findings of the clinical examination and patient history are not consistent with primary headache, then secondary headache

types are assumed. In such cases, further investigations, including neuroradiological studies are indicated. In clinical practice, a useful mnemonic for the identification of “red flags” that should prompt physicians to indicate neuroimaging studies is SNOOP4 (S: systemic symptoms/signs, N: abnormal findings on neurological examination, O: sudden onset, O: older age at onset above 50 years, P4: positional headache, precipitated by Valsalva maneuver or exercise, progressive headache, papilledema) (Table 1) [3].

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the American Headache Society (AHS) guidelines do not recommend neuroimaging studies for patients with normal neurological examination, stable headache without atypical features, that fulfil the diagnostic criteria for a primary headache, while – with the exception of subarachnoid

**Figure 1.** Secondary Headache Disorder Aetiology according to the International Classification of Headache disorders, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, beta version



**Table 1.** Red flag signs for the diagnosis of headaches (SNOOP4)

Mnemonic	Presentation
Systemic symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever of unidentified cause, weight loss, chills and myalgia</li> <li>• Malignancy, immunocompromised patient</li> </ul>
Neurological symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signs of motor weakness and sensory loss, diplopia or ataxia</li> <li>• Abnormal signs in neurological examination</li> </ul>
Onset sudden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thunderclap headache, sudden onset, with peak intensity in &lt;1 minute</li> </ul>
Onset after age 50 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Onset after the age of 50 years</li> </ul>
P 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progressive headache or pattern change</li> <li>• Headache worsening after Valsalva manoeuvre</li> <li>• Postural aggravation</li> <li>• Papilledema</li> </ul>

hemorrhage and in emergency settings – Computed Tomography (CT) should not be performed if Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is available [4-7]. Conversely, neuroimaging should be performed in all patients presenting with atypical symptoms and signs, for example irregular or new headache patterns; increase in the severity of headache; history of epileptic seizures or head trauma; history of malignancy, active infections, stroke or intracranial bleeding; focal or new neurological deficits; and other “red flags” that may be suggestive of an underlying disorder [5, 8, 9].

Besides the choice of imaging modality (CT versus MRI), the diagnostic protocols also depend on several factors, including patient history, headache pattern, duration, intensity and presence of concomitant neurological signs, as well as depending on whether new-onset or recurrent headache is being investigated [9, 10]. Overall, MRI has a superior sensitivity compared to CT, especially for depicting abnormalities in the posterior fossa, acute ischemic lesions, and mass lesions, while simultaneous performance of an expanded MRI protocol with advanced MRI methods may enable accurate differential diagnosis and treatment planning [11]. It should be noted that the differential diagnosis of headache is practically exhaustive, since headache can comprise an epiphenomenon of many neurological or systemic diseases [1, 2].

Herein, we will review the most commonly encountered causal factors of secondary headache along with the associated neuroradiological findings, focusing on conventional and advanced MRI techniques.

### Secondary headache attributed to cranial or cervical vascular disorder

#### *Craniocervical artery dissection*

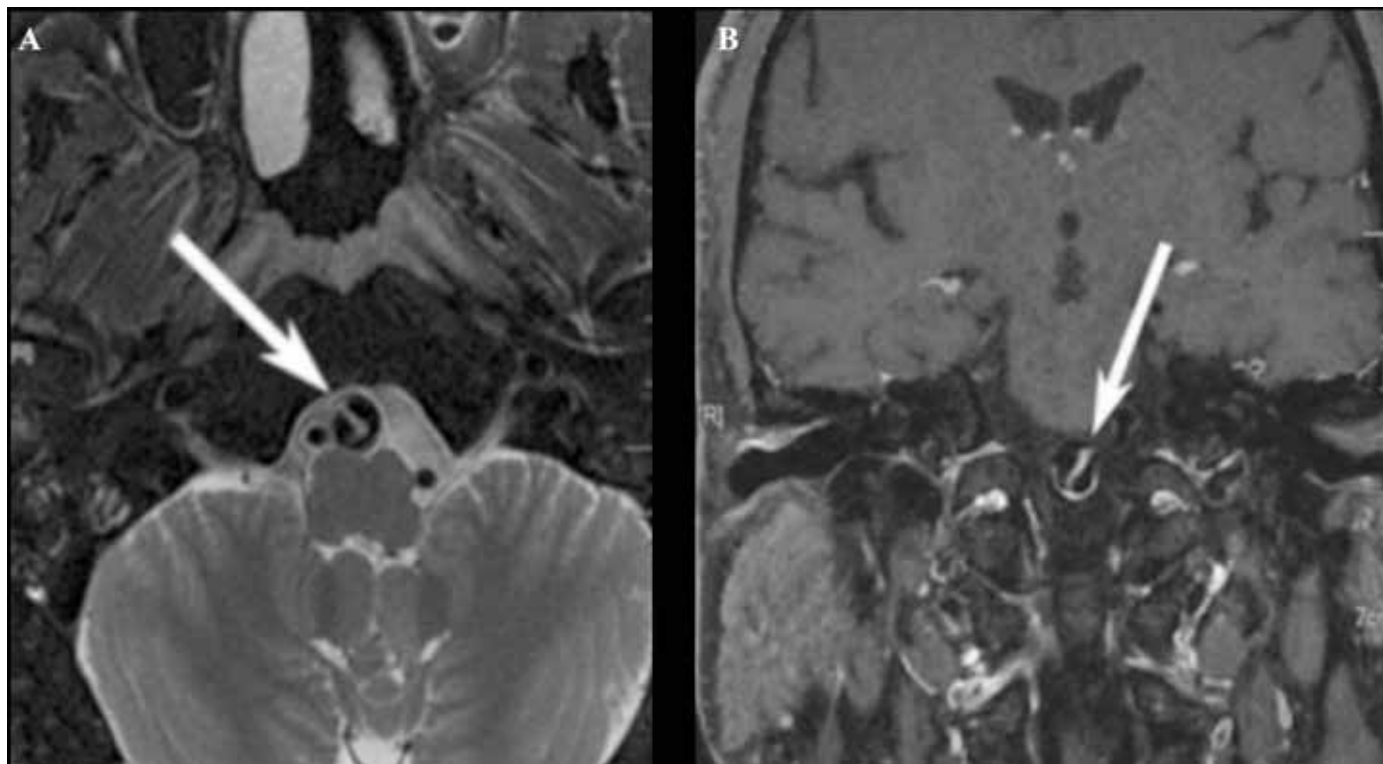
Craniocervical artery dissection (CAD) is a frequent cause of ischemic stroke in young and middle-aged

adults [12]. Prompt and accurate CAD diagnosis is essential for the identification of the underlying stroke aetiology and prevention of stroke recurrence [13, 14]. The clinical presentation of CAD is variable, ranging from mild symptoms, including neck pain, Horner’s syndrome and headache, to severe stroke syndromes [14, 15]. Notably, the headache in CAD is typically ipsilateral to the dissection site [13]. In affected patients, ultrasonography may provide direct or indirect evidence indicative of CAD [16]; in the majority of cases, however, neuroimaging studies including Computed tomography angiography (CTA), MR angiography (MRA), or Digital subtraction angiography (DSA) are required to establish CAD diagnosis.

With respect to CT neuroimaging studies, CTA can provide images of high-resolution and contrast for depiction of the arterial lumen and wall. Two-dimensional (2D) and three-dimensional (3D) reconstruction methods can be employed to construct images comparable to those acquired by DSA, although DSA is still considered the gold standard method for CAD diagnosis [17]. The most typical imaging finding of CAD on CT imaging, with high specificity but low sensitivity, is the so-called “target sign”, which is characterized by a narrowed eccentric lumen surrounded by a hyperdense crescent-shaped mural thickening and thin peripheral enhancement [18]. Additional imaging findings suggestive of CAD include the depiction of an intimal flap and a dissecting aneurysm [18].

With respect to MR imaging studies, MRI and MRA have been shown to have an excellent sensitivity of approximately 87-99%, compared with DSA for the diagnosis of internal carotid artery (ICA) dissection. However, the sensitivity of MRA is reduced to 60% for vertebral artery (VA) dissection due to the low calibre of VA and a flow-related enhancement of the paravertebral veins that may be misinterpreted as CAD [19]. Consequently, if VA dissection is suspected,

**Figure 2.** On axial T2W image (A), a dilated left vertebral artery is depicted along with an hyperintense linear intimal flap. (B) On contrast-enhanced 3D black blood T1W the wall of the left vertebral artery, as well as the intimal flap showed marked enhancement, imaging findings suggesting left vertebral artery dissection. (Reprinted with permission from Wang, YM. *et al.* Chinese specialist consensus on imaging diagnosis of intracranial arterial dissection. *Chin Neurosurg J* **3**, 30 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41016-017-0095-2>)



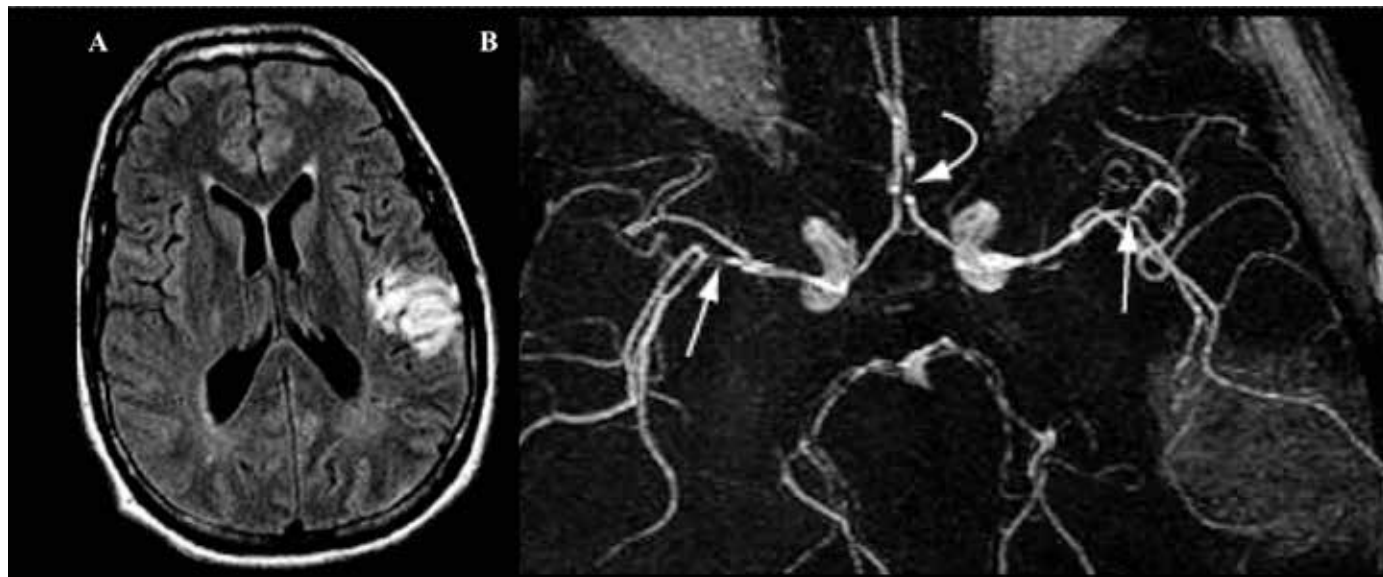
CTA should be performed due to its higher diagnostic sensitivity compared to MRA [19–21]. Notably, contrast-enhanced MRA may provide better results compared to 3D time-of-flight (TOF) MRA [19]. A crescent-shaped intramural hematoma is the most common finding of ICA and VA dissection on MRI. The signal intensity of the hematoma is analogous to the products of haemoglobin breakdown and their paramagnetic effects. In the acute phase, the intramural hematoma may be obscured on T1W fat-saturated images, while in the subacute phase (7 days to 2 weeks post-dissection) the hematoma is depicted with high signal [21]. Additional MRI findings of CAD include narrowed eccentric lumen and increased external diameter of the artery. More recently, heavily T1-weighted flow-suppressed sequences, such as magnetization-prepared rapid acquisition gradient-recalled echo (MPRAGE), have also been implemented to detect carotid intraplaque haemorrhage in CAD [22]. Moreover, 3D black-blood fat-saturated T1W sequence has been shown to have high sensitivity for the depiction of intramural hematoma [23]. Additionally, vessel wall imaging sequences may be performed in addition to TOF-MRA, in order to assess the luminal calibre. Finally, a 3D simultaneous non-contrast an-

giography and intraplaque haemorrhage (SNAP) MRI technique has been recently introduced to provide information both regarding the arterial wall and the arterial lumen in a single scan [23, 24] (Figure 2).

#### Vasculitis

Headache may be the only presenting symptom of giant cell arteritis (GCA), and GCA should always be considered in elderly patients (especially women) presenting with new-onset headache [25]. GCA –also known as temporal arteritis– is a granulomatous vasculitis mainly affecting medium and large sized arteries. The main histological feature of GCA is granulomatous arterial inflammation caused by lymphocytes, histiocytes, and multinucleated giant cells [26]. It must be mentioned that in GCA, unaffected areas may be noted between the inflamed arterial sites, which are known as “skip lesions”. Biopsy results are false-negative in approximately 8–28% of GCA patients, especially when biopsy is taken from normal-appearing lesions, i.e., not guided by imaging studies [27]. Although temporal artery biopsy comprises the gold standard for GCA diagnosis, neuroimaging studies are increasingly used in clinical practice for GCA diagnosis, for biopsy plan-

**Figure 3.** (A) On axial FLAIR image, a high-intensity lesion in the white matter on the left temporal lobe is depicted, which is a non-specific finding. (B) MR angiography shows multifocal segmental narrowing of right and left middle cerebral artery and left anterior cerebral artery (arrows), suggesting primary angiitis of the CNS (PACNS)



ning, as well as for treatment monitoring [28]. Advanced MRI sequences, such as the 3D black-blood fat-saturated T1W sequence, facilitate the depiction of mural inflammation and allow measurement of the mural thickening and quantification of the contrast enhancement [29]. Furthermore, TOF MRA can depict the luminal diameter, which appears decreased in regions affected by GCA [30]. The combination of the two aforementioned MRI techniques has been shown to have a high sensitivity and specificity for GCA diagnosis, of 80% and 100% respectively compared to the gold standard of temporal artery biopsy [30].

Headache, when accompanied by encephalopathy, may also be a presenting symptom of primary angiitis of the central nervous system (PACNS). Although PACNS is a rare nosological entity, high clinical awareness is warranted in patients presenting with headache and encephalopathy, and atypical ischemic strokes. Ischemic infarctions are noted on neuroimaging in approximately 53% of PACNS cases [31]. Conventional MRI techniques reveal multiple infarctions, which are typically bilaterally located, in various stages of healing, of variable size and affecting different vascular territories [32]. Vessel wall MRI (VW-MRI) can also be applied for the diagnosis of PACNS, depicting prominent vessel wall enhancement [33]. Notably, PACNS should be differentiated from vasculitis that may be secondary to other causes, including infection, systemic disease, malignancy, drug use, or radiation therapy, and histological confirmation is required for definite PACNS diagnosis [32, 34] (Figure 3).

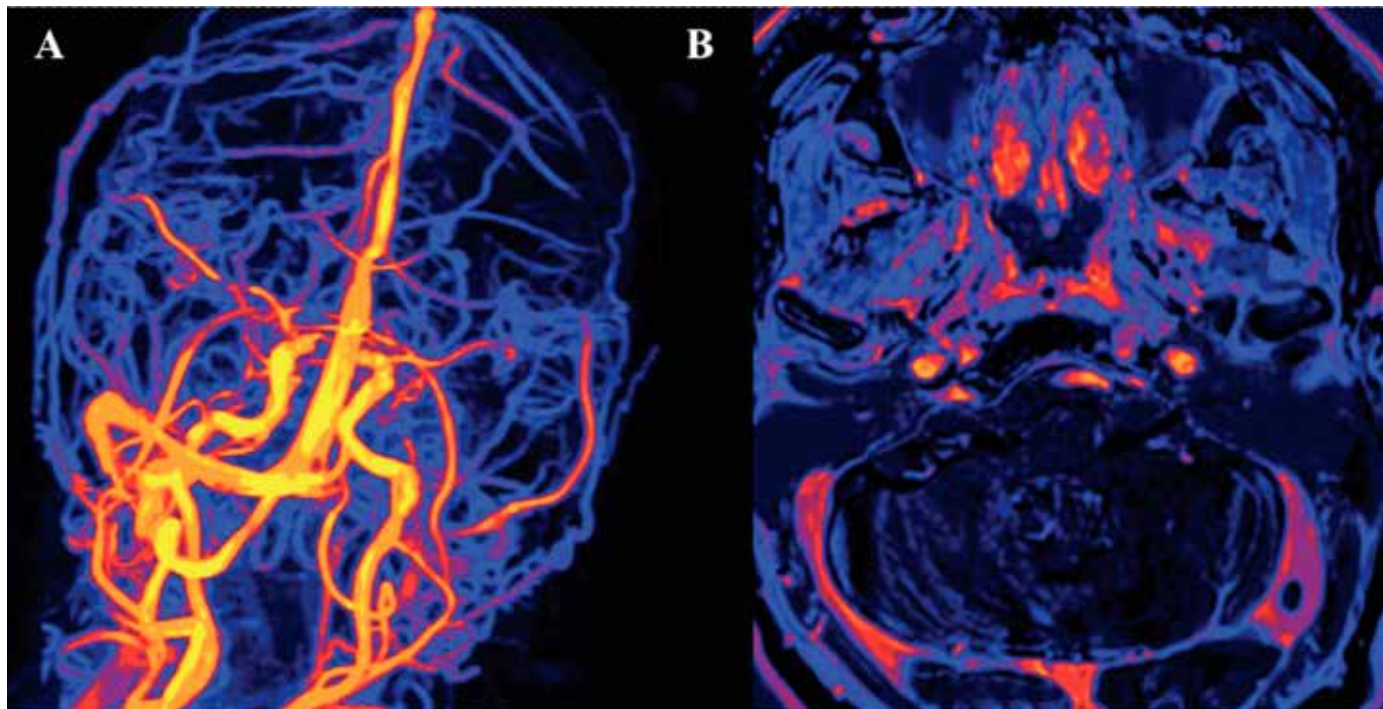
#### *Cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST)*

Headache, focal neurological deficits, epileptic seizures, intracranial hypertension and encephalopathy comprise frequent clinical presentations of CVST, with varying intensity depending on the site of venous thrombosis [35]. Headache is present in more than 85% of CVST patients [36, 37]. Although CVST-associated headache may be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, papilledema, and visual disturbances, in some cases headache may be the only CVST presenting symptom. The spectrum of headache patterns associated with CVST is very wide, but the most commonly encountered is subacute-onset headache with rapid worsening, that may mimic subarachnoid haemorrhage, migraine or intracranial hypertension [38, 39].

Neuroimaging studies comprise the cornerstone of CVST diagnosis and aim to answer: (1) whether there is evidence of cerebral venous occlusion; (2) whether there are findings of parenchymal or other intracranial lesions; (3) which is the underlying cause of CVST [40, 41]. In more than 85% cases of CVST cases, a prothrombotic risk factor or a direct underlying cause can be identified, while multiple CVST causes can be found in approximately 1/3 of cases [35]. Furthermore, neuroimaging studies are additionally used for the follow-up of CVST patients, depicting the venous recanalization and treatment response, and for excluding CVST complications or recurrence.

CT is considered as first-line imaging modality for patients admitted to the emergency room (ER) with suspected CVST. Non-enhanced brain CT may depict

**Figure 4.** A 65-year-old male presented with headache. (A) Time-of-flight (TOF) MR venography shows absence of normal flow signal in the left transverse and left sigmoid sinuses, indicating CVST. (B) Axial contrast-enhanced MRV depicts a filling defect in the left transverse sinus, corresponding to a nonenhanced ovoid thrombus



hyperdense thrombus in the dural sinus (“dense triangle sign”) or in cortical veins (“cord sign”), but in up to 2/3 of CVST cases the findings of non-contrast-enhanced brain CT are false negative [42]. By contrast, CT venography (CTV) has a 95% sensitivity for CVST diagnosis compared to DSA as the gold standard [43].

In CVST patients, MRI findings are time dependent, as the signal intensity of the thrombus may vary according to the haemoglobin degradation [44]. Phase-contrast and time of flight MRV may detect CVST, but each technique has limitations and disadvantages (Figure 4). Contrast-enhanced MR-venography (MRV) is highly accurate in diagnosing CVST at all stages, including the chronic stage compared to any other type of MRV [45]. Digital subtraction angiography (DSA), albeit considered the gold standard for CVST diagnosis, is nowadays reserved for patients that may require endovascular treatment [46].

Parenchymal abnormalities as consequence of CVST include venous infraction, intraparenchymal and subarachnoid haemorrhage, hydrocephalus due to impaired CSF absorption and brain edema are better assessed on MRI rather than on CT [47]. Use of Diffusion weighted imaging (DWI) and apparent diffusion coefficient (ADC) map can facilitate the distinction between vasogenic and cytotoxic brain edema, that may coexist in CVST [48, 49]. Finally, it should be stressed that neuroimaging is important

for exclusion of CVST recurrence which affects approximately 12-13% of patients [50].

#### *Subarachnoid Haemorrhage (SAH)*

Thunderclap headache is a characteristic manifestation of subarachnoid haemorrhage (SAH). Typically, patients describe this type of headache as the “worst headache of their life” [37]. SAH is classified in traumatic and spontaneous SAH. Among the causes of spontaneous SAH, rupture of intracranial aneurysms accounts for up to 85% of SAH cases [51]. The remaining 15% of SAH patients have no discernible cause of bleeding [52]. Crucially, perimesencephalic SAH is a distinct type of SAH, that accounts for 5% of all SAH cases and is related to underlying venous drainage anomalies rather than underlying aneurysms [53].

On neuroimaging, the distribution and epicentre of SAH can indicate the localization of a ruptured aneurysm or other underlying pathologies that may precipitate non-aneurysmal SAH. For example, the presence of convexity SAH sparing the basal cisterns, the Sylvian fissure, the interhemispheric fissure or the ventricles with additional imaging findings of microbleeds and cortical superficial siderosis may indicate cerebral amyloid angiopathy as the underlying cause of SAH [54]. With respect to aneurysmal SAH, the most frequent localization of aneurysms in approximately 90% of cases involves the anterior circulation [55].

**Figure 5.** Post traumatic subarachnoid haemorrhage (SAH). Acute subdural hematoma and acute epidural hematoma is depicted on the right hemisphere and along the tentorium cerebelli. Additionally, hyperdense material is seen filling the sulci adjacent to the subdural and epidural hematoma, suggestive of traumatic SAH. Secondary features of mass effects are depicted, including midline shift and right ventricle compression



With respect to CT studies, (Figure 5), in a patient presenting with thunderclap headache it is pivotal to indicate emergent CT scan, that besides native CT should include CTA for exclusion of underlying aneurysms. For the detection of aneurysms >3 mm, CTA—especially using subtraction and three-dimensional reconstructions—has a sensitivity and specificity that approaches 100% and is thus, comparable to that of DSA [56, 57]. Nonetheless, DSA remains the gold standard for the definitive detection or exclusion of underlying intracranial aneurysms, and is superior to CTA for detection of small-sized aneurysms (Figure 6). Moreover, DSA is indicated for patients that may require endovascular treatment.

With respect to MRI findings of aneurysmal SAH, the fluid-attenuated inversion recovery (FLAIR) MRI sequence is sensitive for depicting SAH in the first 12 hours, when SAH appears as hyperintensity in the subarachnoid spaces. FLAIR is superior to CT for subacute and chronic SAH, as “aging” hematoma is difficult to capture on CT in subacute and chronic stages [58, 59]. MRA has a sensitivity of approximately 80% for depicting cerebral aneurysms, but its sensitivity is lower for detection of small aneurysms

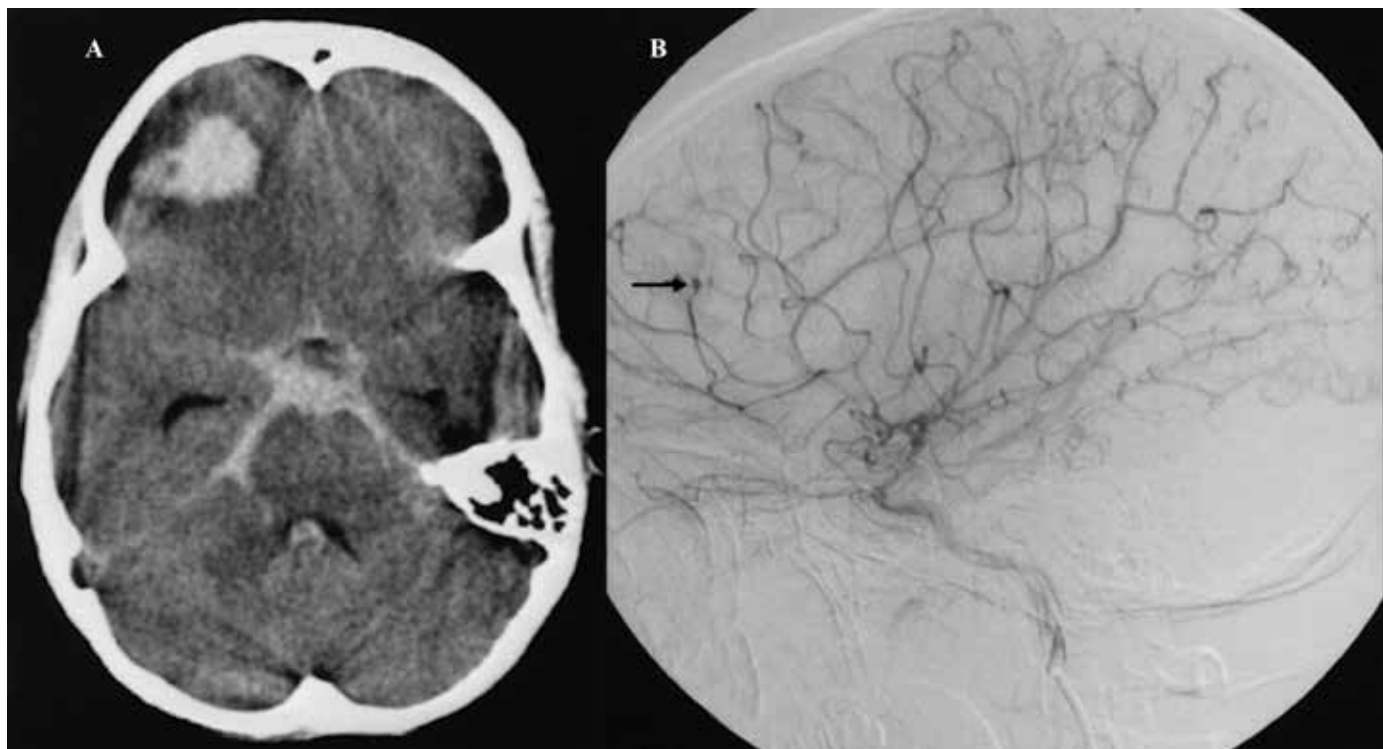
(diameter <3mm in maximum diameter) and aneurysms located at the internal carotid artery and anterior cerebral artery [60]. The sensitivity of gradient echo (GRE) sequences differs between the different SAH stages, ranging from a 94% sensitivity during the early SAH stages (up to 4 days), to a 100% sensitivity beyond the acute SAH stage (after 4 days from index event) [61]. Importantly, DWI may demonstrate early ischemic changes associated with SAH or delayed ischemic changes associated with vasospasm, which may complicate up to 20% of SAH cases [62]. MR perfusion can be a useful tool for the diagnosis of cerebral ischemia and evaluation of the cerebral blood flow [63]. Besides the acute SAH diagnosis, it is important to note that MRI has an additional role in excluding concomitant aneurysms, that are not ruptured or may have undergone subclinical rupture (as indicated by haemoglobin products depicted on GRE sequences), as well as for treatment follow-up (i.e., in patients with vasospasms undergoing vasodilator therapy, or patients with aneurysms treated with non-ferromagnetic clips or endovascular therapy).

#### *Reversible Cerebral Vasoconstriction Syndrome (RCVS)*

RCVS is clinically characterized by thunderclap headache, which is pathophysiologically related to reversible vasoconstriction of the cerebral arteries. The headache is mainly localized in the occipital lobes, but in some cases may be diffuse. RCVS may be noted in the post-partum period, while typical risk factors include the use of vasoactive substances and drugs (i.e., marijuana, cocaine) [64]. Diagnostic criteria for RCVS have been suggested with 98-100% specificity including: (i) thunderclap headache with periodical recurrence; or (ii) single thunderclap headache either without evident abnormality on neuroimaging or with neuroimaging evidence of watershed infarct/vasogenic edema; or (iii) abnormal angiographic findings with normal neuroimaging and no headache [65]. At symptom onset, neuroimaging may be normal in approximately 50% of RCVS cases [64]. On neuroimaging, RCVS may be diagnosed based on imaging finding either directly pertaining to vascular narrowing or indirectly to RCVS complications (Figure 7).

With respect to CTA, MRA or DSA studies, findings compatible with RCVS include: smooth tapered narrowing from large to medium-sized arteries with concomitant second-order and third-order branch dilatation, which is the so-called “string of beads” appearance of cerebral arteries [66]. Vessel wall MRI (VW-MRI) may be additionally performed in order to exclude arterial wall enhancement, which is typically not present in RCVS, but may be noted in vasculitis and intracranial atherosclerotic plaques [67]. RCVS complications should also be evaluated using CT or

**Figure 6.** A middle-aged male patient presented with thunderclap headache in the Emergency Room. (A) On axial CT, subarachnoid haemorrhage and intraparenchymal cerebral haemorrhage in the right frontal lobe were noticed. CT angiography did not reveal any aneurysm. (B) On Digital Subtraction Angiography (DSA), a small aneurysm, with diameter less than 3mm, at the right middle cerebral artery was depicted (arrow)



MRI studies, including with decreasing frequency: vasogenic edema (38%), cerebral convexity SAH (22-34%), watershed infarct (29%) or lobar haemorrhage (6-20%) [64, 68]. The typical RCVS course entails resolution of clinical symptoms and neurovascular findings within 8-12 weeks [69].

#### *Cerebral autosomal dominant arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy (CADASIL)*

CADASIL is a rare autosomal dominant microvasculopathy affecting young and middle-aged patients, and is characterized by recurrent subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy, migraine with aura and vascular dementia [70-72]. MRI is the gold standard for CADASIL diagnosis, typically revealing three types of lesions in CADASIL patients: i) widespread confluent white matter hyperintensities, with symmetrical and bilateral tendency, which already at early stages involve the anterior temporal lobe and the external capsule; ii) lacunar infarcts; and iii) cerebral microbleeds [73]. Neuroimaging findings, and particularly the white matter hyperintensities may precede the clinical manifestations of CADASIL (Figure 8). Advanced MR techniques may enable early detection of neuronal loss and demyelination, in regions that may

appear normal with conventional MRI techniques. ADC histograms, Diffusion tensor imaging (DTI) and magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS) may assess ultrastructural alterations that may be associated with the clinical phenotype [74, 75]. Also, it has been suggested that quantitative diffusion MRI can offer predictive metrics for assessment of CADASIL progression [75, 76].

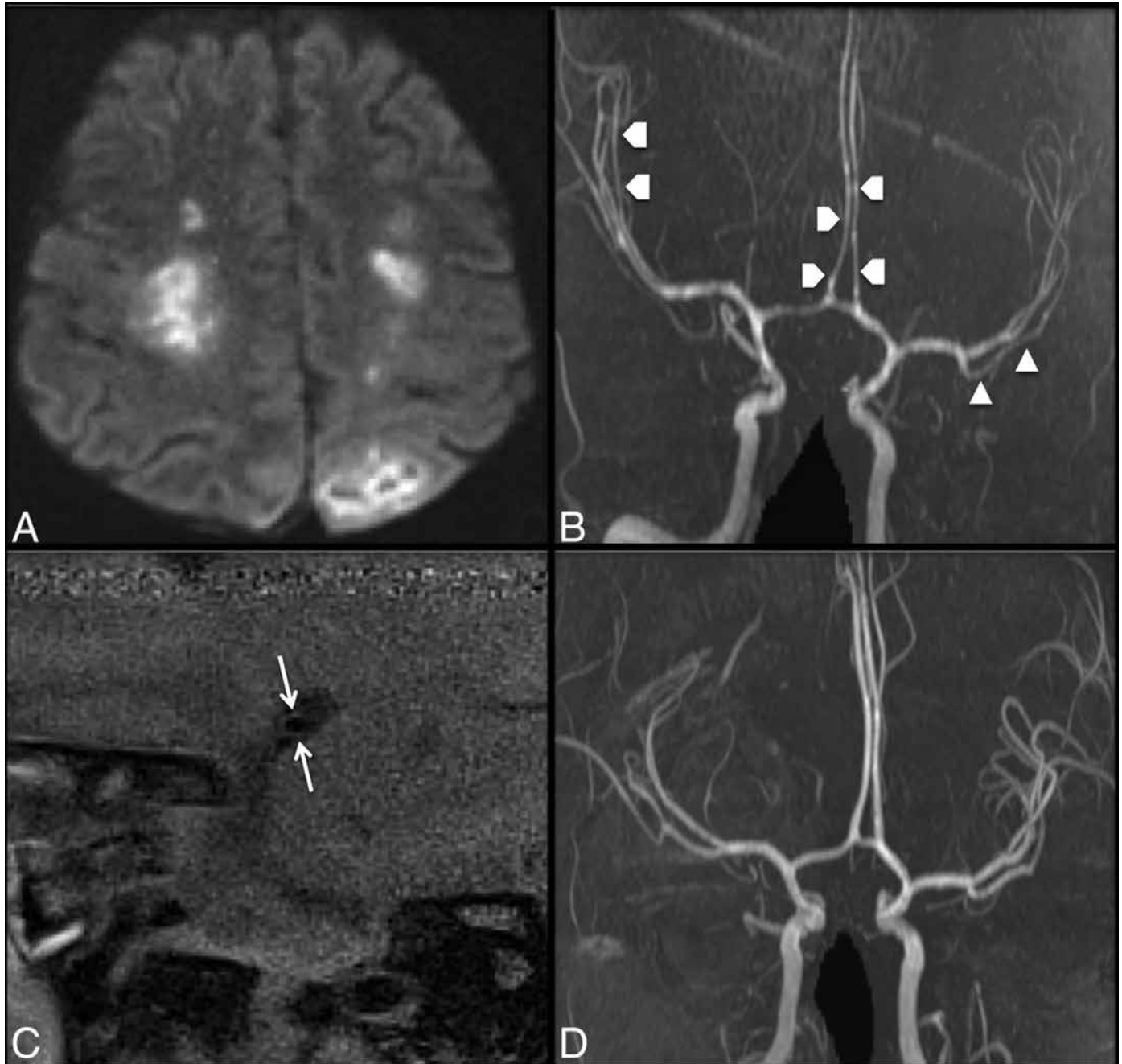
#### **Secondary headache attributed to non-vascular intracranial disorders**

##### *Intracranial Hypotension*

Intracranial Hypotension (IH) is a rare syndrome characterised by decreased CSF pressure < 6cm H<sub>2</sub>O. A CSF leak along the neuroaxis, in the cervical or thoracic spine in the majority of patients, is the cause of CSF pressure decrease [77, 78]. Typically, IH patients present with a headache with postural pattern, worsening when upright and improving in a recumbent position, with symptom improvement within 15 minutes from lying down. Additional symptoms include vomiting, nausea, vertigo, visual and hearing disturbances and neck pain. According to the causative factor, IH is classified in primary-spontaneous (SIH) and secondary i.e. iatrogenic or traumatic.



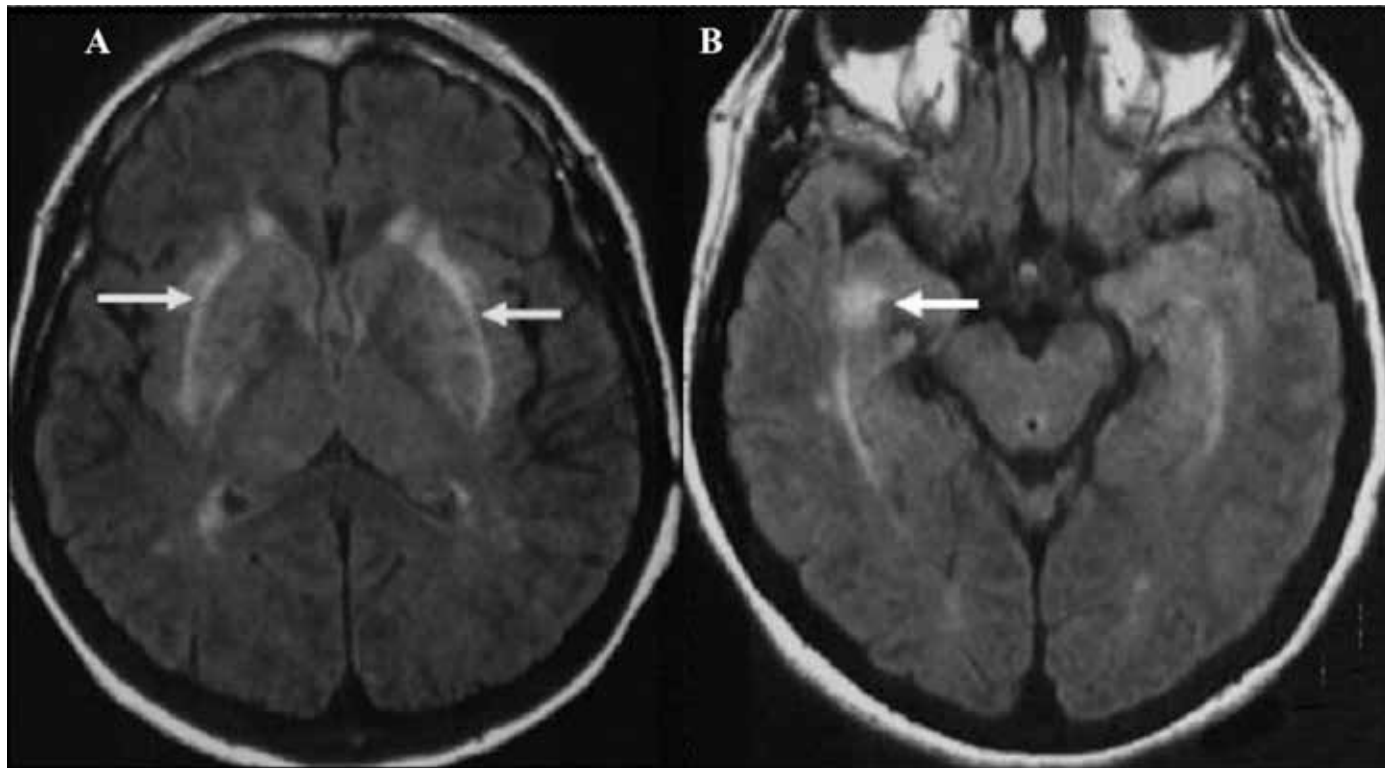
**Figure 7.** A 55-year-old woman who presented with severe headache and developed left-sided weakness. DWI (A) shows multifocal infarcts involving the centrum semiovale and left posterior parietal lobe. On coronal 3D reformatted TOF MRA (B), there is diffuse narrowing of the bilateral middle and anterior cerebral arteries (white arrowheads). Parasagittal postcontrast T1 high-resolution Vessel Wall Imaging (VWI) of the M1 arterial segment of the left MCA (C) shows mild wall thickening and minimal enhancement (similar findings were noted in the right M1 arterial segment, not shown). The patient was diagnosed with RCVS, with subsequent resolution of cerebral vasoconstriction (D)



ICHD-3 has established diagnostic criteria for SIH combining both clinical and radiological findings: i) any type of headache fulfilling the following conditions: headache developed in relation to decrease of CSF pressure; or CSF leakage; or headache leading to the discovery of CSF leak; ii) CSF pressure  $<6$  cm  $H_2O$  or/and imaging findings of CSF leak; iii) is not attributed to any other ICHD-III diagnosis [78].

The pathophysiological mechanism explained by Monro-Kellie doctrine may help understand the imaging findings of IH [79]. The main imaging findings of IH reflect the alteration of the equilibrium between CSF volume, intracranial blood and brain tissue. Since the brain tissue volume is stable, a decrease in CSF volume will be followed by compensatory increase of intracranial blood. These changes thus, result into

**Figure 8.** On axial FLAIR images, in a 26-year-old patient with family history of cerebral autosomal dominant arteriopathy with subcortical infarcts and leukoencephalopathy (CADASIL), widespread white matter hyperintensities most pronounced in the temporal lobes are demonstrated. The thalami and pons are also affected



dilatation of vascular spaces, specifically the venous spaces due to their higher compliance [80].

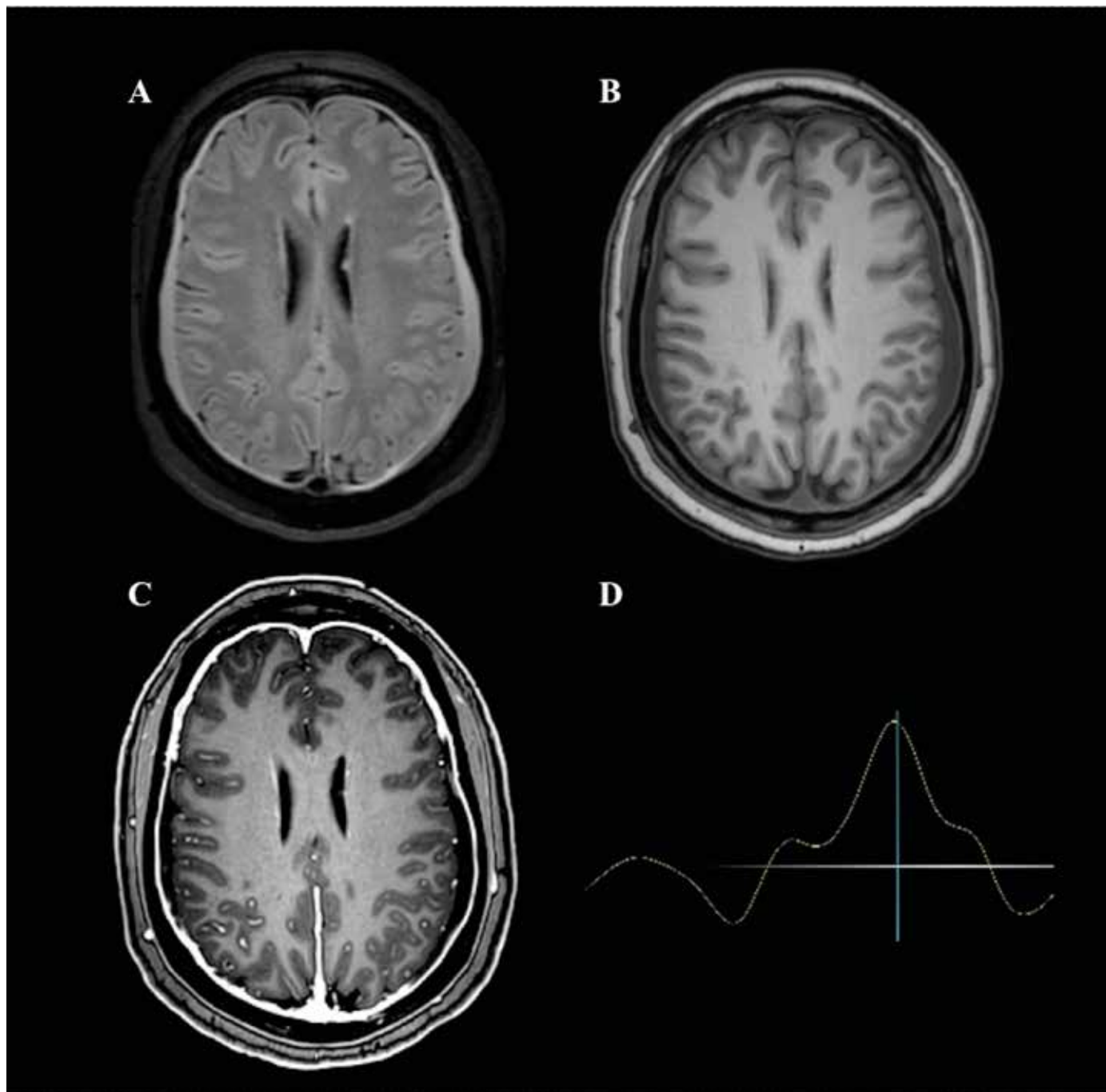
Brain CT can be a helpful tool for the initial diagnosis of IH in the ER as well as in the outpatient setting [78]. Nevertheless, the imaging method of choice for IH diagnosis and treatment monitoring is brain MRI, while intravenous contrast administration is mandatory to depict the typical IH features. It should be noted, that brain imaging may be normal in approximately 20-30% of patients with clinically confirmed diagnosis according to the aforementioned diagnostic criteria proposed by ICHD-3 [78, 81]. Complementary whole spine MRI with intravenous contrast administration has been recommended in patients unresponsive to medical treatment to identify IH and potentially to depict the site of CSF leakage. Although spine MRI can detect in some case the location of CSF leak, CT myelography (CTM) is more sensitive for leak identification [82]. Conventional myelography must be performed either when a rapid leak is suspected, which may be obscured on CTM, or when CTM findings are normal. Invasive MR myelography with intrathecal gadolinium administration has a higher sensitivity than CTM for CSF leak depiction, but the intrathecal use of gadolinium still remains off-label [83-85].

During the past years, CSF flow studies on MRI

have been increasingly used to assess and quantify pulsatile CSF flow. 2D phase-contrast MRI (PC-MRI) is the most widely used velocity encoding method for CSF flow analysis. Typically, the CSF flow parameters obtained with PC-MRI are significantly lower in IH patients compared to healthy controls (Figures 9, 10) [86]. Moreover, a correlation has been established between CSF flow parameters, headache intensity and CSF opening pressure [86]. Similarly, PC-MRI parameters in patients with spontaneous IH may be used for treatment follow-up [87].

Diffuse pachymeningeal thickening and enhancement is the most common MRI finding in IH patients. The thickening and enhancement is typically smooth and continuous without skip areas. The aforementioned imaging findings are attributed to “leaky” dural microvessels, which have been shown to lack tight connections and enable “spilling” of gadolinium [88]. It should also be mentioned that diffuse pachymeningeal thickening may not be evident in chronic IH cases, which in conjunction with changes in clinical findings (i.e., alteration of the headache pattern) may hinder IH diagnosis [89]. Another common imaging feature in IH patients, affecting approximately 50% of cases, is the presence of hyperintense subdural effusions due to the presence of proteinaceous fluid leaking from the congested dura [90]. Further imag-

**Figure 9.** A middle-aged female patient 5 days after sinus surgery presented with headache and fever. On axial FLAIR (A) and T1W (B) images, enlarged subdural collections and prominent dural thickening were evident, along with strong pachymeningeal enhancement on post-contrast T1W (C). On 2D phase-contrast MRI (PC-MRI) (D), the CSF flow metrics did not reveal any sign suggestive of intracranial hypotension

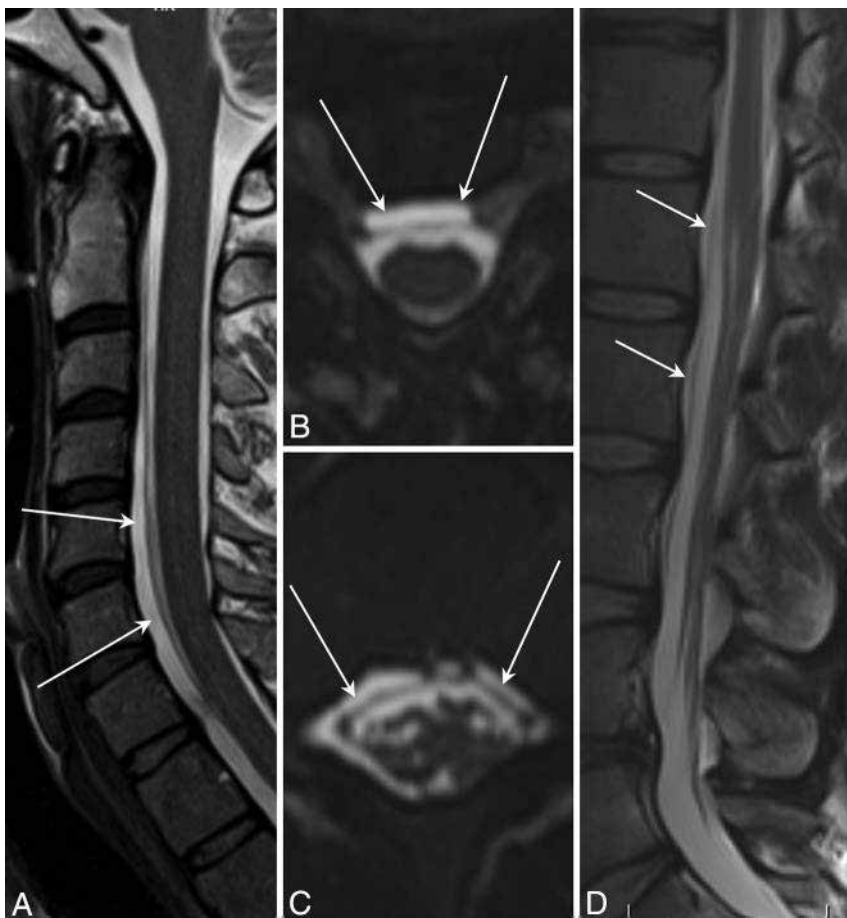


ing abnormalities include engorgement of venous structures, enlargement of the pituitary gland, caudal tonsillar displacement and slit ventricles [88].

Spinal MRI, in 67-100% of cases, will show fluid collections-spinal hygromas in the epidural space. Longitudinally, spinal hygromas typically exceed five spinal segments, and are located either anteriorly or posteriorly to the dural sac [91]. Other findings

suggestive of IH include engorged spinal epidural veins, circumferential dural enhancement usually combined with intracranial dural enhancement and fluid between the C1-C2 spinous processes. The latter finding is attributed to transudate leakage from the rich regional venous plexus and is considered as a CSF "false-localizing" sign [91].

**Figure 10.** Spinal longitudinal extradural collections. (A), Sagittal T2 FSE. (B), Reformatted axial 3D-T2W images show spinal longitudinal extradural CSF collections (SLECs - arrows) and displaced dura outlined by the CSF. (C and D), Images similar to A and B of the same patient show similar findings in the lower thoracic region



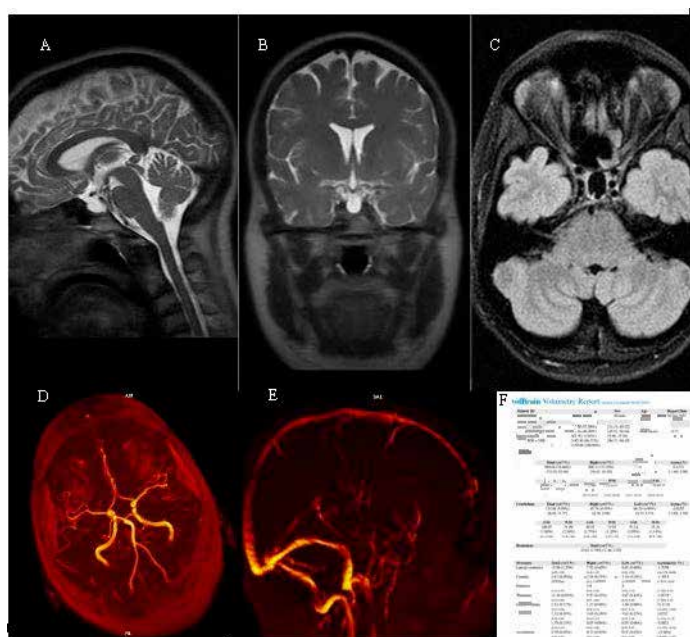
#### *Idiopathic Intracranial hypertension (IIH)*

IIH, previously known as pseudotumor cerebri, comprises another cause of secondary headache, attributed to elevated intracranial pressure, without evident causative mass or hydrocephalus. Typically, there is a female predominance, with IIH affecting mostly women of reproductive age, with increased body mass index. The most common presenting symptom of IIH is a pressure-like, throbbing headache. Additional clinical symptoms include transient visual obscuration with typical tunnel vision, photopsia, eye pain, pulsatile tinnitus, rarely 6<sup>th</sup> cranial nerve palsy and papilledema, which warrants ophthalmological evaluation. When lumbar puncture is performed, the CSF composition is normal but the opening CSF pressure is in most cases increased (>20cm H<sub>2</sub>O in normal weight patients and >25cm H<sub>2</sub>O in obese patients) [92]. Revised diagnostic criteria for IIH have been proposed by Friedman et al. including both clinical and neuroimaging findings [93]. Neuroimaging must precede diagnostic lumbar puncture to exclude

increased CSF pressure due to other causes, including brain tumor, dural sinus thrombosis, infection, hydrocephalus.

Structural MRI is the cornerstone for IIH diagnosis, which enables the exclusion of other underlying causes of elevated intracranial pressure, but also facilitates the identification of neuroimaging abnormalities characteristic for IIH. The main axes of neuroimaging should be tailored to assess the orbits and the intracranial compartment. Orbital changes comprise (i) prominent subarachnoid space around the optic nerves with vertical tortuosity, (ii) flattening of the posterior sclera followed by intraocular protrusion, and (iii) enhancement of the optic nerve head [94-96]. The majority of imaging findings in the intracranial cavity are associated with the enlargement of outpouchings of the arachnoid space. The most suggestive imaging findings of IIH intracranially are the 'empty sella' sign, depicted as loss of the midsagittal height of the pituitary gland, and the Meckel's cave enlargement, depicted as enlargement

**Figure 11.** 32-year-old female patient, complaining for headaches, with confirmed by lumbar puncture Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension, demonstrating in sagittal (A) and coronal T2W (B), as well as in transverse FLAIR (C) images the classic “empty sella” sign, and the optic nerves with vertical tortuosity. No signs of arterial or venous sinuses thrombosis in MRA (D) and MRV (E). Normal values in whole brain Volumetric analysis (F). The patient was treated with acetazolamide, as she refused the neurosurgical shunting procedure



of the porus trigeminus notch accompanied by a smooth cystic space in the anteromedial petrous apex [97, 98]. Semiautomated volumetric methods can quantitatively assess the volume of the optic nerve sheath and pituitary gland. Objective metrics derived from the volumetric assessment may be utilized both for the diagnosis and follow-up of IIH patients [99].

Another suggestive imaging feature of IIH occurring in 65-90% of cases is transverse sinus narrowing depicted on MR venography, which may require further investigation with contrast-enhanced 3D MR venography or invasive digital subtracted venography [100]. Other less common signs of IIH are slit-like ventricles and acquired tonsillar ectopia, which is a mimicker of Chiari Malformation Type 1 [101]. Phase-contrast cine magnetic resonance imaging (PCC-MRI) and derived CSF parameters have also been used as a non-invasive technique for IIH diagnosis and treatment follow-up [102] (Figure 11).

#### Chiari Malformation Type 1 (CM1)

The hallmark of Chiari Malformation Type 1 is the projection and downward displacement of the cerebellar tonsils through the foramen magnum. The clinical features of CM1 are proportional to the degree of tonsillar prolapse. Headache is a common presenting symptom of CM1, along with symptoms associated with brainstem compression / dysfunction,

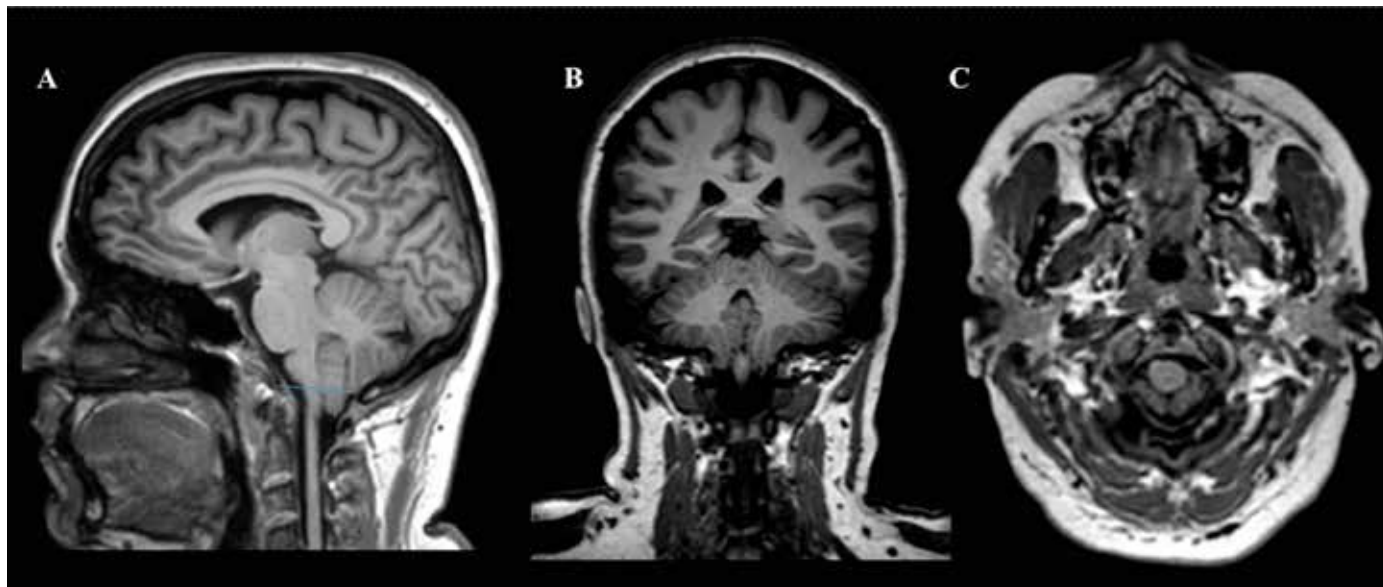
syringomyelia, or hydrocephalus [103]. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that Valsalva maneuver or cough can provoke headache in the setting of CM1. Low-lying tonsils (benign tonsillar ectopia) must be differentiated from CM1, with the former being asymptomatic and considered an incidental finding compatible with tonsillar protrusion of up to 3-5 mm through the foramen magnum.

The imaging modality of choice for the diagnosis of CM1 is MRI. The cerebellar tonsillar position can be accurately assessed on MRI and the degree of caudal descent can be measured, preferably on midsagittal plane. The imaging signs supporting CM1 include pointed tonsils referred as ‘peg-like’ tonsils, vertically oriented sulci referred as ‘UK sergeant stripes’ and crowding of subarachnoid space at the level of cranio-cervical junction by tonsillar prolapse mainly observed on axial images (Figure 12) [104]. Measuring of the CSF flow with PC-MRI may be abnormal in cases of CM1 due to pulsatile motion of tonsils [105]. The imaging protocol should include spinal cord MRI in order to exclude the presence of syringomyelia, that may be evident in 40% of patients with CM1 [106].

#### Brain Tumour

As already mentioned, headache can be caused by any space-occupying brain lesion. The headache pattern caused by brain neoplasms varies and the

**Figure 12.** Cerebellar tonsillar caudal descent through the foramen magnum attributed to Chiari Malformation Type I. (A) On sagittal image, the cerebellar tonsils are low-lying (>5mm) and appear ‘peg like’ and pointed. Cerebellar tonsillar position is the vertical distance (purple line) from the tip of the cerebellar tonsils to a line drawn between the anterior and posterior rims of the foramen magnum, known as McRae line (blue line). (B) On coronal image, the tonsillar caudal descent is depicted. (C) Axial image through the foramen shows crowding of the medulla by the tonsils. No syrinx was evident



majority of patients presents with atypical findings [107]. Recently, advanced MRI techniques have radically changed the diagnostic approach to intracranial tumours. The WHO 2021 classification and grading of brain neoplasms has added more information about the phenotype of brain tumours and their genetic-molecular and genetic-prognostic correlations [108]. Conventional and advanced MRI techniques enable the diagnosis and staging of brain tumours, neurosurgical and radiotherapy planning, as well as treatment monitoring differentiating between pseudoprogression, progression or recurrence (Figures 13-16) [109].

### Secondary headache attributed to infection

#### Brain Abscess

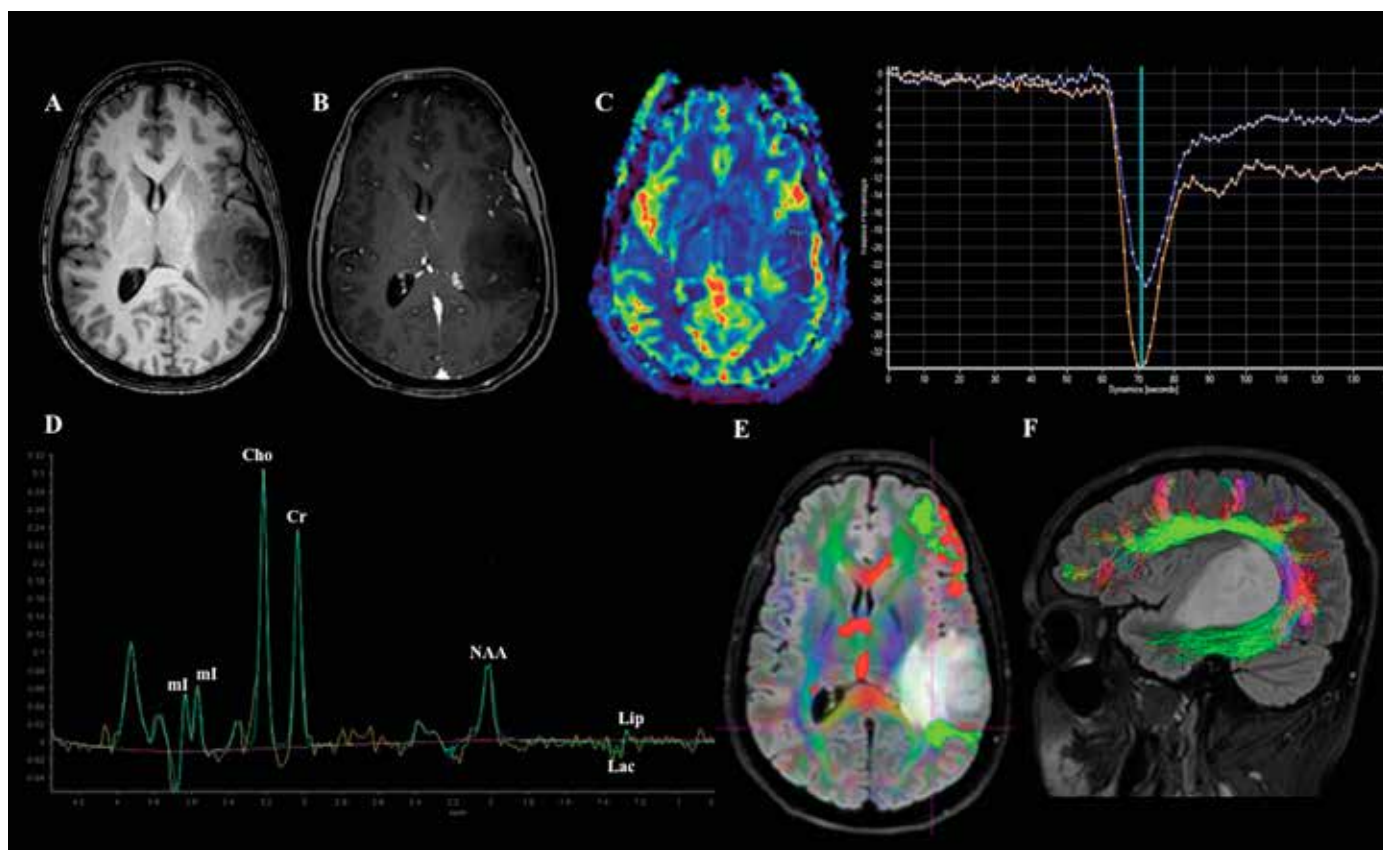
A cerebral abscess is a consequence of encephalitis and is typically characterized by accumulation of pus, which is surrounded by a capsule. Encephalitis and brain abscess can result from haematogenous dissemination (i.e., endocarditis), or as a complication of contiguous spread from paranasal sinuses, odontogenic or ear infection. Headache may be present in 69% of patients, but only 20% of them will suffer from the classic triad, which consists of headache, fever and focal neurologic deficits [110].

The pathogenesis of a brain abscess includes four distinct stages: early cerebritis (1-3 days), late cerebritis (4-9 days), early capsule formation (10-13 days) and late capsule formation (from 14 days onwards). Fur-

thermore, five histological zones have been described, that can aid understanding of the neuroimaging findings: (1) a necrotic centre; (2) an external zone of accumulated inflammatory cells, macrophages and fibroblasts; (3) a capsule with dense collagen; and (4) peripheral astrogliosis and edema [111].

With respect to neuroimaging, CT scan is not as sensitive as MR, with 6% of cases having false negative CT-findings. CT scan is invaluable in the ER for assessment of the degree of brain edema [111]. Besides abscess diagnosis, both CT and MRI may be used to depict potential complications, including ventriculitis and CSF obstruction with secondary hydrocephalus. With respect to MRI studies, conventional MRI sequences can be combined with complementary advanced MRI techniques (MR spectroscopy) for obtaining information that may be suggestive of specific pathogens. The necrotic centre of an abscess will appear on MRI with high signal on T2W, a three-layered low-signal capsule on T2W and vivid capsule enhancement on T1W after gadolinium injection [112]. Beyond conventional imaging, the abscess cavity is depicted with high signal on DWI with corresponding low value on ADC map, due to the purulent content. Furthermore, MR-perfusion helps in differentiating a brain abscess with low regional cerebral blood volume (rCBV) from a brain tumor with necrotic part, which typically has high rCBV due to high vascularization. Despite the use of advanced imaging, however, diagnostic difficulties in differentiating between abscess and brain tumour

**Figure 13.** A 32-year-old male presented with headache and on MRI a space occupying lesion is depicted, mainly located on the left temporal lobe. On T1W image (A), the lesion shows inhomogeneous low signal with no evident enhancement on post contrast T1W (B). (C) On perfusion dynamic susceptibility contrast T2\* (DSC-T2\*) the relative cerebral blood volume (rCBV) ratio was calculated 3.79, compatible with high grade brain tumor. (D) On TE=144ms single voxel MRS inside the lesion, increased concentrations of choline (Cho), creatine (Cr), lactate (Lac) and lipids (Lip) are depicted with Cho / Cr ratio of 1.35 and Cho / NAA 2.38. Furthermore, peaks of myoinositol (mi) are depicted, a finding that supports the differentiation of a lower-grade glioma into a higher-grade glioma. (E) Presurgical task-based functional MRI (TB-fMRI) and Resting-State fMRI (RS-fMRI) based on the Blood oxygenation level dependent (BOLD) phenomenon were acquired and the lateralization of hippocampal and language networks was left-sided. The lesion was in close proximity, distance <1cm, with the posterior part of the left upper temporal gyrus (Wernicke), but also with the primary auditory cortex. The distance of the lesion from the Broca's area (inferior frontal gyrus) was clearly bigger than 2cm. (E) On Diffusion tensor imaging tractography –DTI tractography– the lesion was in close proximity with, probably infiltrating, the posterior part of the left superior longitudinal (arcuate) fasciculus, the inferior longitudinal fasciculus and the inferior fronto-occipital fasciculus



may arise in the early stages of capsule formation, when increased capillary density of the abscess may correspond to increased rCBV and lead to misdiagnosis [111].

MR Spectroscopy (MRS) is another advanced method widely performed for differential diagnosis of brain lesions that enables the delineation of their metabolic profile. MRS may show peaks of amino acids, lactate, lipids, succinate, acetate and alanine. The presence of peaks of amino acids is a sensitive marker of pyogenic abscess due to the breakdown of neutrophils inside the capsule, releasing proteolytic enzymes, which hydrolyse proteins into amino acids. However, absence of amino acids on MRS may be noted in

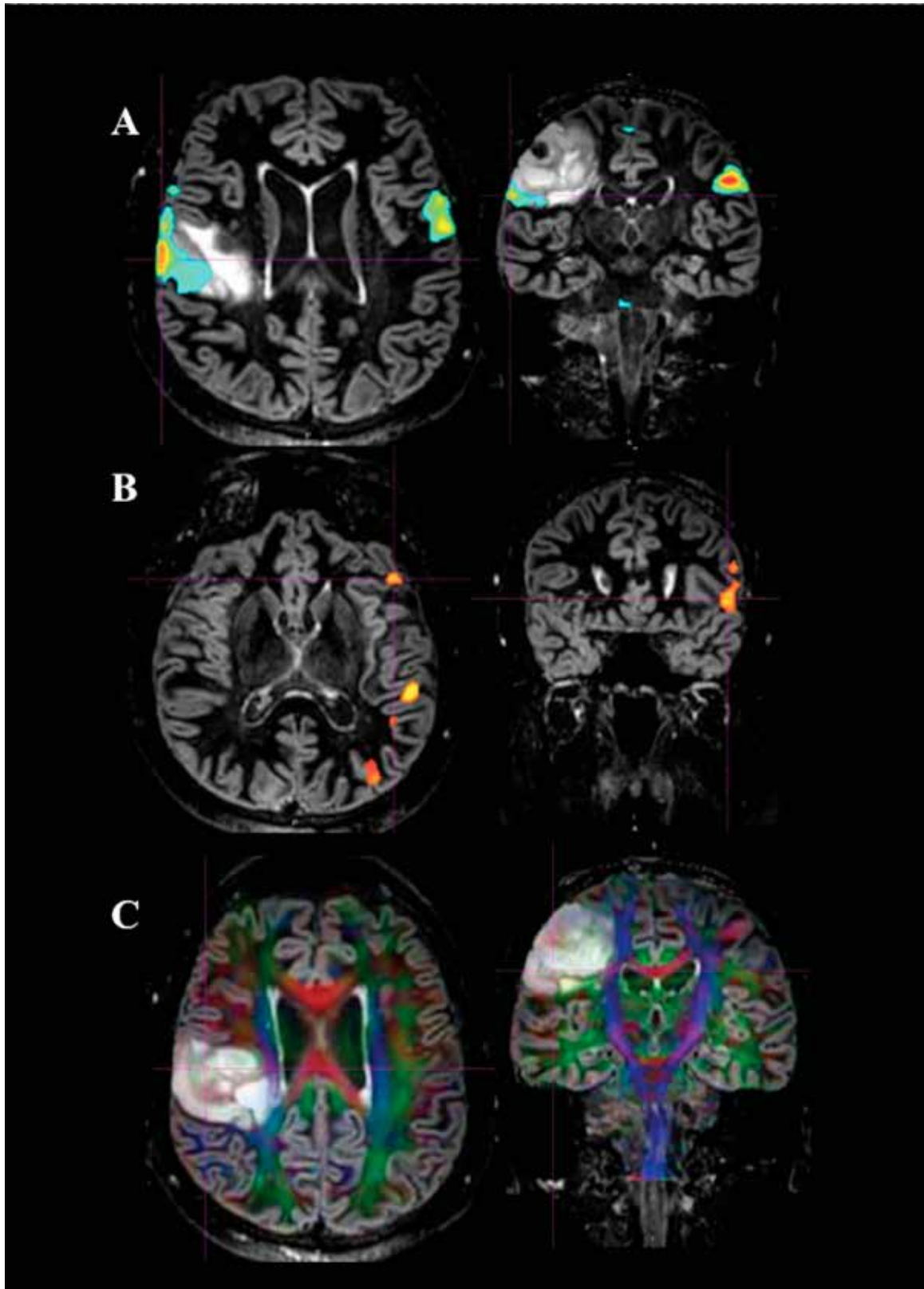
patients with brain abscess who have undergone previous treatment with antibiotics. Furthermore, the peak of acetate with or without succinate on MRS has been described as a signature feature for anaerobic infection (Figures 17, 18) [113].

### **Headache or facial pain attributed to disorder of the cranium, neck, eyes, ears, nose, sinuses, teeth, mouth, or other facial or cervical structures**

#### *Rhinosinusitis*

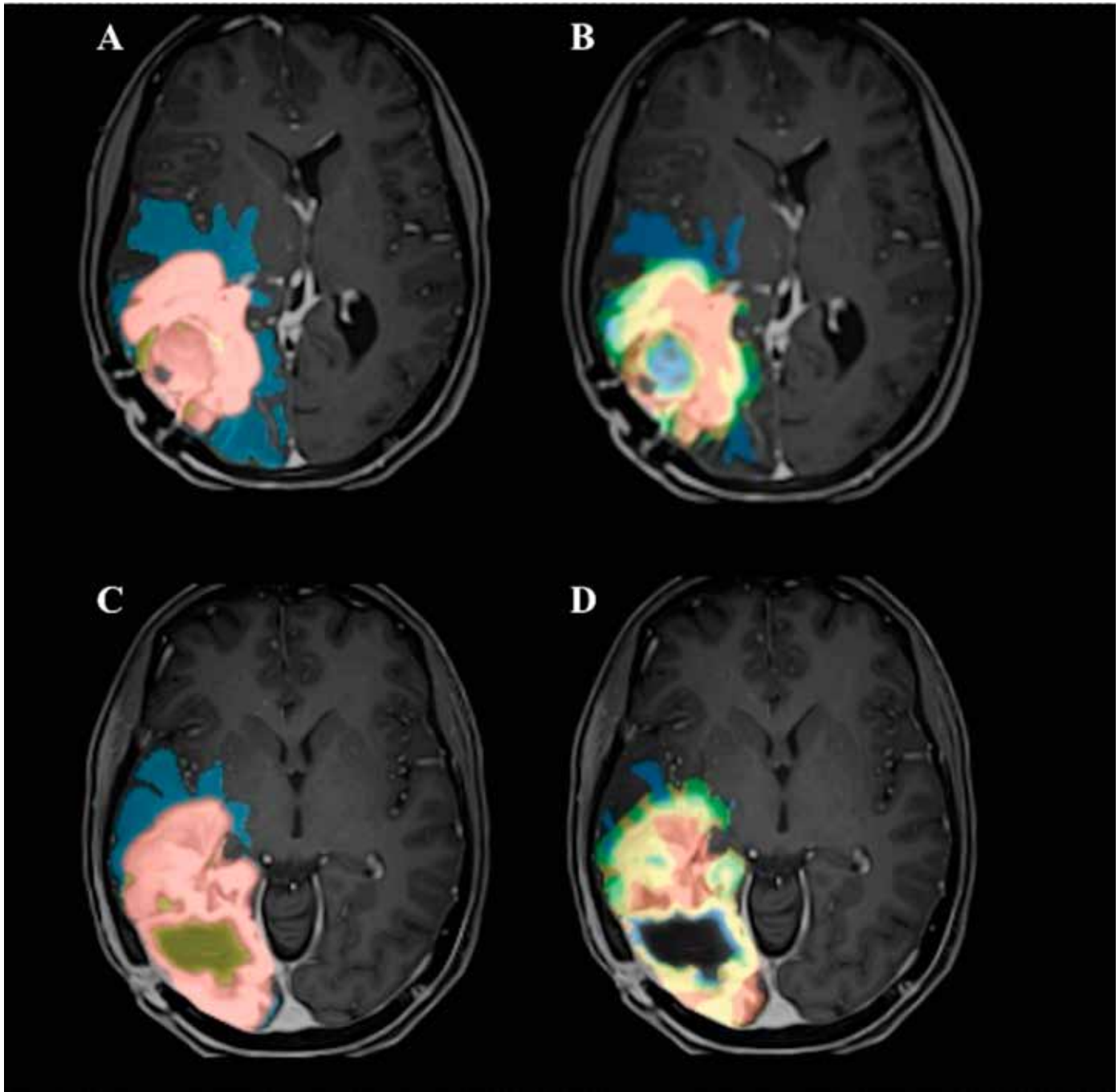
Rhinosinusitis can be divided in acute, subacute

**Figure 14.** Presurgical mapping in a 54-year-old patient presented with headache and neurological deficits. (A) Task-based functional MRI (TB-fMRI) with a paradigm of tongue movement revealed close proximity of the space occupying lesion and the corresponding cortical activation area of the tongue motion. (B) Inferior frontal gyrus (Broca's area) and superior temporal gyrus (Wernicke's area) activations in TB fMRI showed left-side lateralization of language. (C) Diffusion tensor imaging tractography depicted signs of probable infiltration of the right corticospinal tract and the right superior longitudinal fasciculus





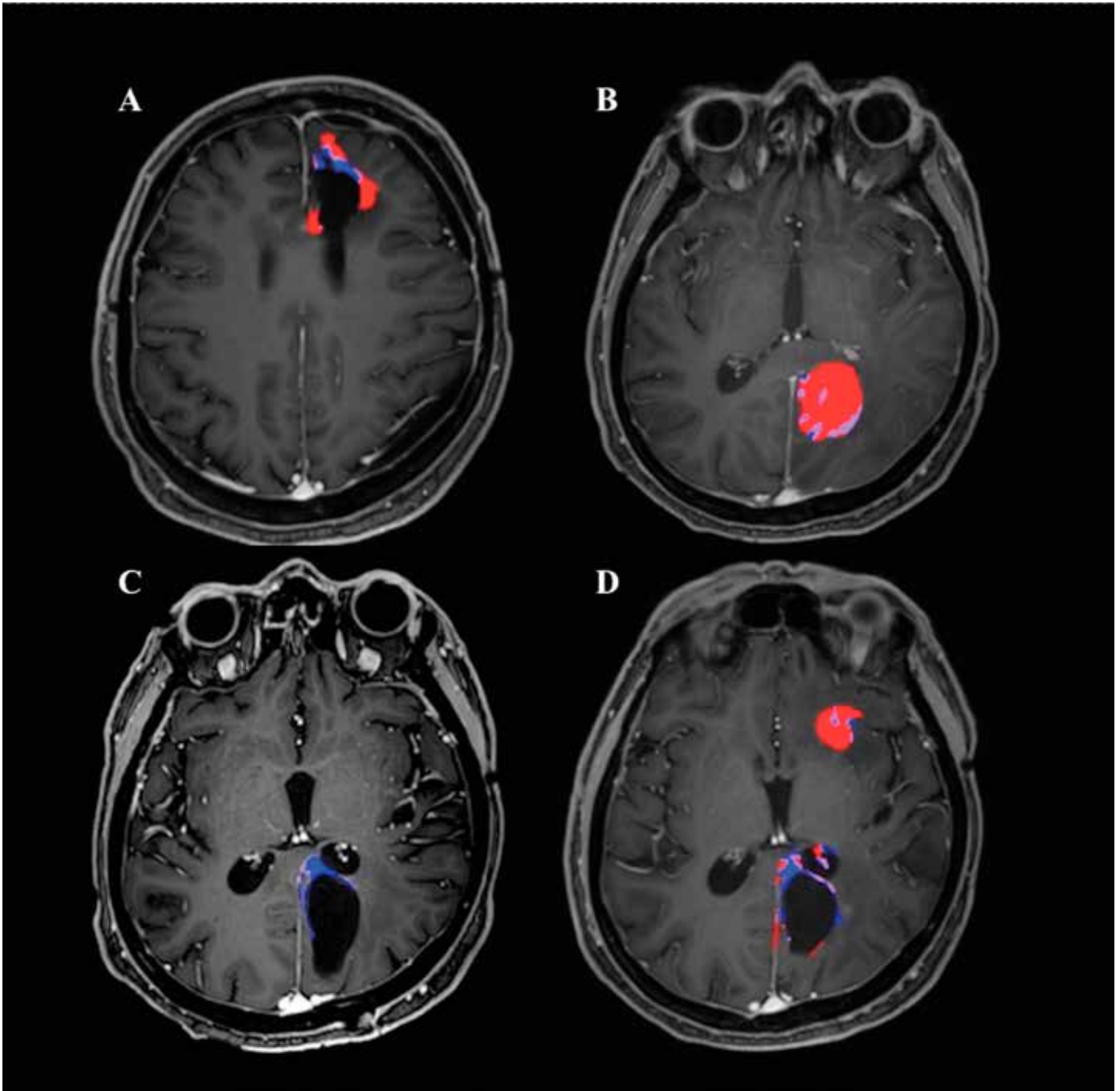
**Figure 15.** Artificial Intelligence (AI) segmentation for presurgical mapping and follow-up. (A) Presurgical AI anatomical segmentation map and volumetric assessment of enhancing tumor (pink-93.70ml), edema (blue-135.52ml) and necrosis (green-8ml) (B) Presurgical AI quantification based on perfusion dynamic susceptibility contrast T2\* (DSC-T2\*), for the description of vascular heterogeneity of the enhancing tumor and edema tissues in terms of the angiogenic process located at these regions. Red colour depicts high angiogenic enhancing tumor region-HAT (30.7ml), yellow colour depicts low angiogenic enhancing tumor region-LAT (45.55ml), green colour depicts potentially tumor infiltrated peripheral edema-IPE (28.86ml) and blue colour depicts pure vasogenic edema-VPE (82.75ml). (C) Post-surgery follow-up with AI segmentation maps and volumetric metrics (enhancing tumor-94.47ml, edema-133.21ml and necrosis-18ml). (D) Post-surgery follow-up AI with based on DSC-T2\* quantification (HAT-22.88ml, LAT-54.04ml, IPE-25.61ml, VPE-83.44ml)



and chronic depending on the duration of symptoms. Headache is the most frequent clinical symptom of rhinosinusitis. With respect to neuroimaging, imaging

findings of rhinosinusitis are non-specific and must always be correlated with evidence from clinical and/or endoscopic exams. It is noteworthy that 20-40%

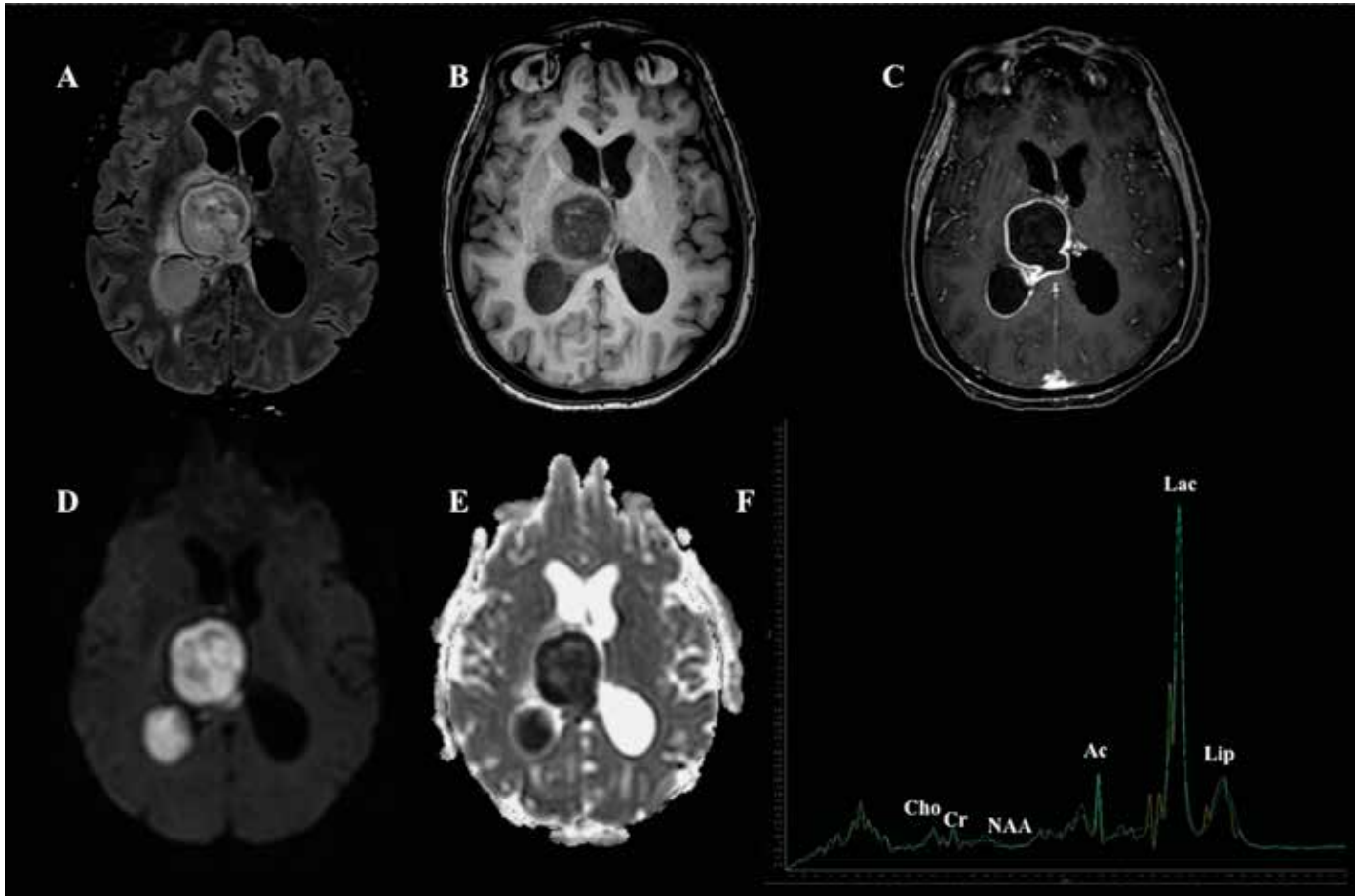
**Figure 16.** DSC – T2\* Perfusion MRI - based Fractional Tumor Burden (FTB) in the follow up of a glioblastoma multiforme patient with prior surgery and radio-chemo-therapy (red colour- $rCBV > 1.556$  representing areas of high relative cerebral blood volume (rCBV), purple colour-  $1 < rCBV < 1.556$  representing areas with mild increased rCBV, blue colour -  $rCBV < 1$  representing normal rCBV). (A) Signs of relapse were evident (red colour-58.8%). (B) On the left frontal lobe, no signs of residual tumor were evident after the second surgery, but a new lesion on the left occipital lobe was depicted. This lesion consisted with 74.7% with  $rCBV > 1.556$ , 20.8% with  $1 < rCBV < 1.556$  and 4.4% with  $rCBV < 1$ . (C) Follow-up MRI after the third surgery did not reveal signs of residual tumor or relapse. (D) On follow-up MRI post-radiotherapy and post-chemotherapy, a new lesion on the left temporal lobe was depicted with 58.9% of  $rCBV > 1.556$



of patients undergoing MRI for any indication may incidentally show imaging abnormalities suggestive of rhinosinusitis [114]. Plain radiographs are part of the initial work up but have some limitations in as-

sessing the extent of the inflammation, the sphenoid sinuses and potential complications of rhinosinusitis. CT scan remains the imaging modality of choice for depicting sinonasal cavities with higher anatomical

**Figure 17.** A female, who underwent dental surgery complained for headache and fever. On axial FLAIR (A), a high-signal-intensity mass with a low-signal-intensity capsule was detected. Perilesional high-signal-intensity vasogenic edema was also noted. Furthermore, high-signal intensity was also revealed inside the right lateral ventricle. On axial T1W image (B) the lesion showed low-signal-intensity and the right lateral ventricle showed intermediate/high-signal intensity. On T1W post contrast (C) ring-like enhancement of the lesion was detected, as well as contrast enhancement was noted on the wall of the right lateral ventricle. On DWI b=1000 (D) the centre of the lesion showed a high signal, as well as inside the right lateral ventricle, with low ADC values (E), reflecting diffusion restriction. On TE=144ms single voxel MR-Spectroscopy (F) peaks of lipids (Lip), lactate (Lac), amino acids and **acetate (Ac)** were evident. All the imaging findings were compatible with pyogenic abscess complicated with ventriculitis. Staphylococcus epidermis was shown as the pathogenic microorganism after surgical aspiration of the lesion



accuracy and can also be used as preoperative evaluation method [115]. Furthermore, CT scan is preferred for bone assessment, especially when chronic sinusitis is suspected. On the other hand, MRI has been suggested as the preferred imaging modality for evaluation of intracranial and orbital complications. Additionally, MRI is superior to CT for differentiating between inflammatory and neoplastic processes, while in case of a neoplasm MRI can also facilitate staging and surgery planning [116, 117].

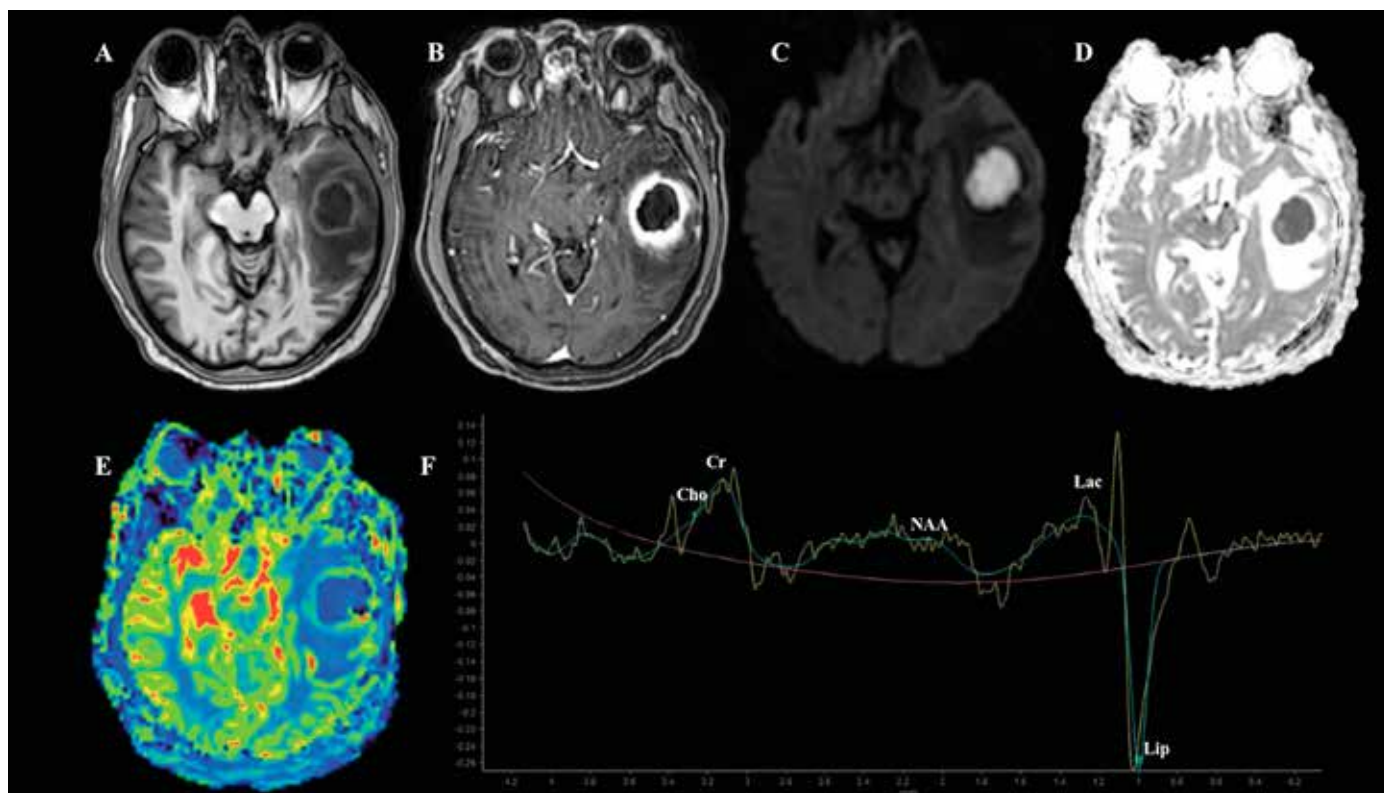
Mucosal thickening along with presence of gas-fluid level and air bubbles within the paranasal sinuses are prominent on CT in acute rhinosinusitis, while when fungal infection is suspected, CT may reveal hyperdense lesions and probable calcifications within

the paranasal sinuses [116, 118]. On T1 weighted images the mucosal thickening is isointense to soft tissue and the fluid is hypointense. On T2 weighted images both mucosal thickening and fluid will be hyperintense. On post contrast T1 weighted image only the inflamed mucosa will enhance in cases of acute rhinosinusitis or when acute and chronic rhinosinusitis concur (Figure 19). Bone sclerosis, rarefaction and periosteal reaction are best evaluated on CT scan and are considered hallmarks of chronic rhinosinusitis [116, 118].

#### *Trigeminal Neuralgia (TN)*

Trigeminal neuralgia (TN) belongs to the neuropathic facial pain syndromes and is defined according

**Figure 18.** A 66-year-old male patient with previous history of odontogenic infection presented with headache and neurological deficits along with fever and confusion. On MRI a space-occupying lesion on the left temporal lobe was detected. On T1W (A), the lesion showed inhomogeneous low signal with ring enhancement on post-contrast T1W (B). The central part of the lesion showed diffusion restriction with high signal on DWI b=1000(C) and low-signal on ADC map (D). On perfusion DSC T2\* (H) the relative cerebral blood volume (rCBV) ratio was lower than 1.75. On intermediate TE=144ms single voxel MR-Spectroscopy (F) peaks of lipids (Lip), lactate (Lac), amino acids and especially acetate were evident. All the imaging findings and the patient history were suggestive of brain abscess, confirmed by surgical excision



to the ICHD-III as unilateral distribution of a brief electric shock-like pain, limited to the distribution of one or more divisions of the trigeminal nerve [2, 119]. TN most frequently affects the maxillary or mandibular division of the trigeminal nerve. An innocuous stimulus may trigger the nerve abruptly. According to a recently proposed classification system, TN of unknown aetiology is categorized as idiopathic; TN caused by neurovascular compression is labelled as Classical TN; and TN associated with structural abnormalities (i.e., demyelinating lesions and neoplasms) is characterized as secondary TN [120].

- Classical TN

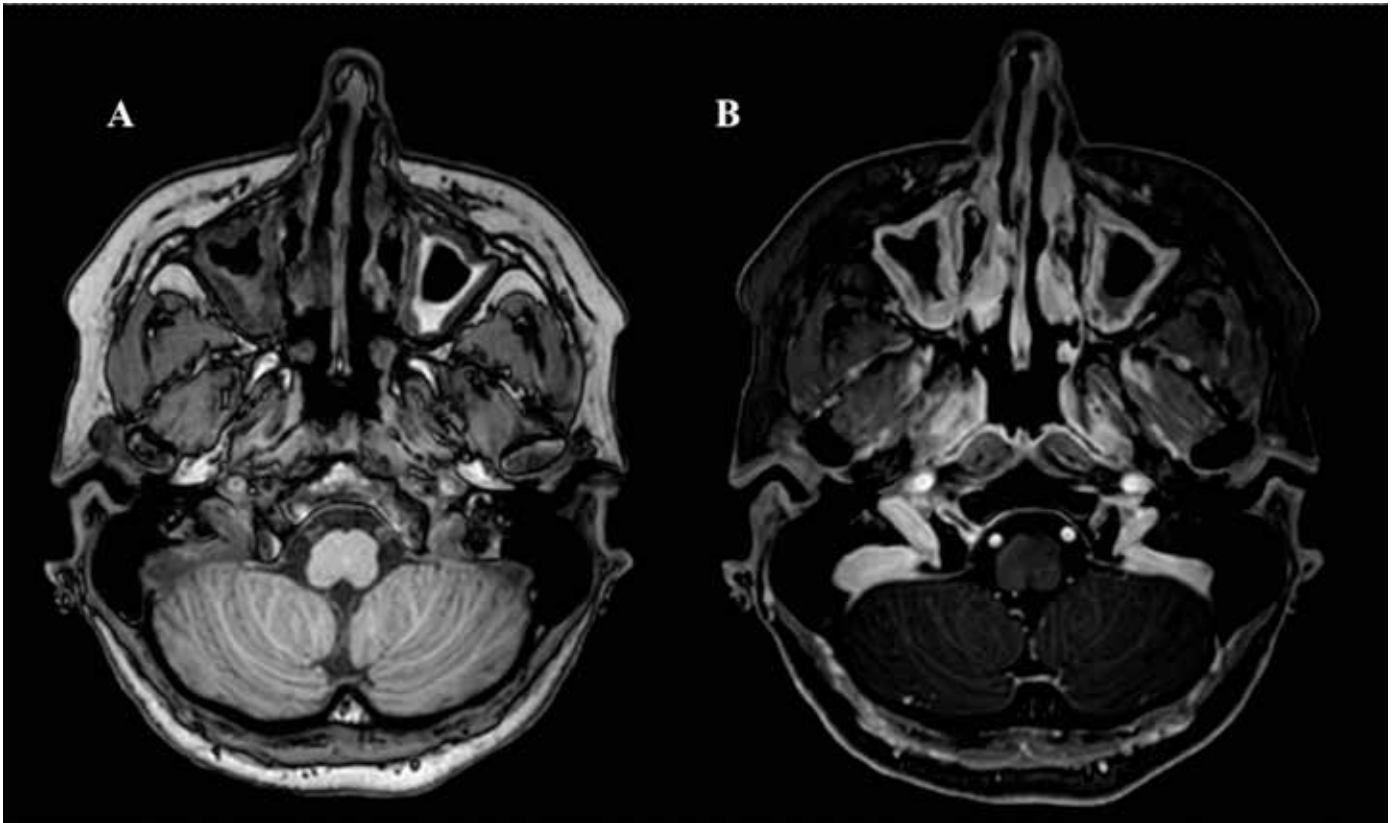
Classical TN is caused by a vascular loop, most commonly arterial, either deriving from the superior cerebellar artery or its branches, compressing the cisternal portion of the trigeminal nerve. Less commonly the vascular loop is formed by the transverse pontine vein, which compresses the trigeminal nerve [121]. The development of high-resolution 3D MRI sequences has increased the diagnostic sensitivity of

vascular loop identification which may enable selection of patients that may benefit from microvascular decompressive surgery. Of note, that imaging findings suggestive of indentation of the trigeminal nerve by a vascular loop may be incidentalomas in patients undergoing MRI, but are far more common in symptomatic TN patients [122, 123]. GRE sequences and contrast-enhanced MRA can reveal the neurovascular contact at the root entry or exit zone of the trigeminal nerve on the affected side (Figure 20) [124]. Furthermore, some studies suggest that fractional anisotropy (FA) on diffusion-tensor imaging (DTI) is significantly lower at the affected side compared to the contralateral side [125, 126].

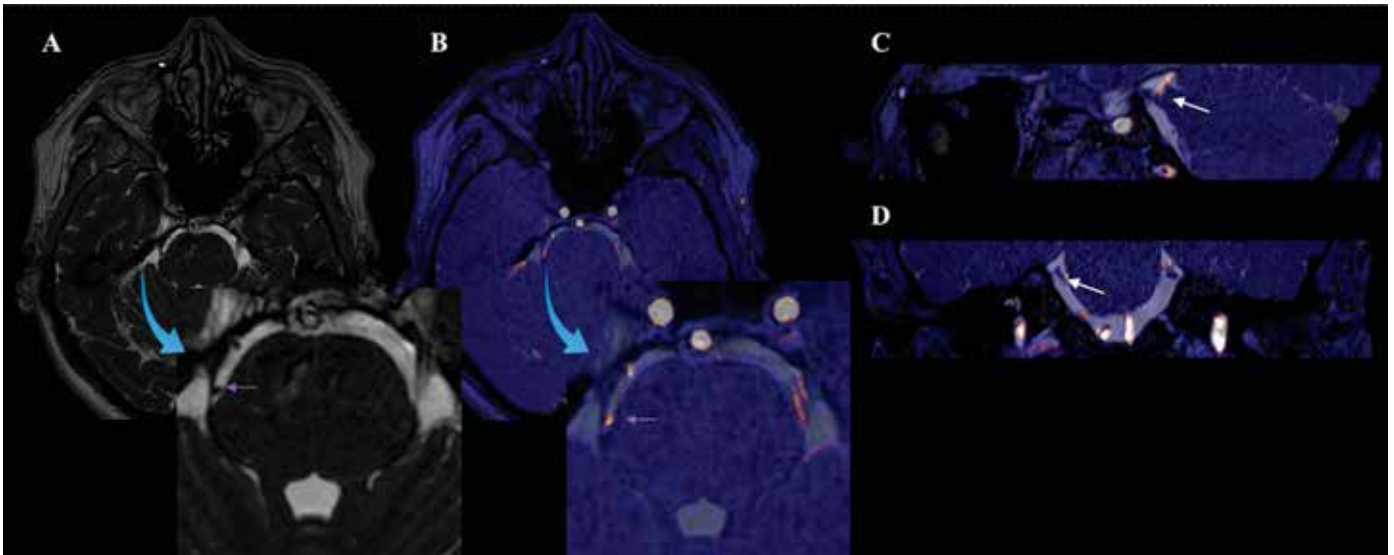
- TN secondary to Multiple Sclerosis (MS)

Patients with MS suffer from different types of neuropathic pain, among which TN is highly predominant. The prevalence of TN in patients with MS ranges from 1.4% to 4.9% [127] and the diagnosis of TN may precede the diagnosis of MS in some cases [128].

**Figure 19.** (A) On axial T1W, peripheral mucosal thickening in maxillary sinuses and ethmoidal cells is depicted along with the presence of fluid-air level and strong enhancement on post-contrast T1W (B), imaging finding suggestive of acute rhinosinusitis



**Figure 20.** Right neurovascular compression by an arterial loop derived from the right superior cerebellar artery indenting the ipsilateral trigeminal nerve at its inferior surface with associated trigeminal nerve atrophy, depicted on heavily T2 weighted high-resolution axial image (A) and on MRA (B-axial, C-sagittal, D-coronal)

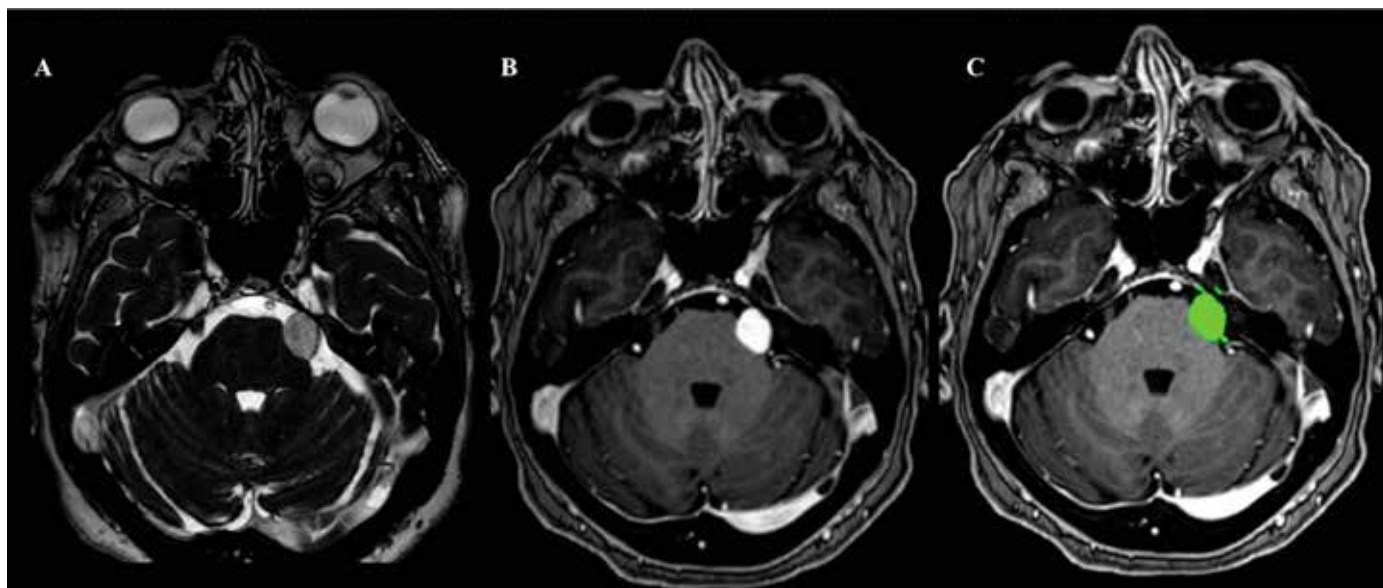


It has been established that TN secondary to MS is associated with the presence of a linear pontine demyelinating plaque involving the intrapontine seg-

ment of the trigeminal nerve, specifically in the area between the root entry zone and the nuclei [129].

The diagnosis of TN in patients with MS is based

**Figure 21.** A well-defined extra axial mass of the left trigeminal nerve is depicted at the left cerebellopontine angle cistern posteriorly to Meckel's cave. Balanced fast field-echo (BFFE) sequence provides detailed anatomical relationship between the mass and the left trigeminal nerve (A). On post-contrast T1 weighted image the lesion shows enhancement (B) with an estimated volume of 1.7441ml (C)



on neurophysiological techniques and MRI for the identification of trigeminal pathway impairment [120]. As MRI is routinely used for the diagnosis and follow-up of MS, a standardized MRI protocol has been suggested [130]. Therefore, in a patient with MS suffering from TN, besides MRI findings compatible with MS, a pontine lesion will be evident. This lesion will be more frequently unilateral, localized in the ventrolateral pons between the trigeminal root entry zone and the trigeminal nuclei, affecting the intrapontine part of primary afferents of the trigeminal nerve (Figure 21) [131].

- TN secondary to schwannoma

Trigeminal schwannoma is the second most common schwannoma following the vestibular schwannoma, mainly occurring in middle-aged adults, with a slight female preponderance. Trigeminal schwannomas are either sporadic or associated with neurofibromatosis type 2 (NF2). This type of schwannoma originates from nerve-sheath Schwann cells, therefore appears as a mass with well-defined margins abutting the nerve. If the schwannoma is confined in one compartment of the nerve it is subcategorized either as preganglionic (cisternal), ganglionic (confined to Meckel's cave) or postganglionic [132]. MRI establishes the location of the schwannoma, the approximate volume and its proximity to important anatomical structures, especially when surgical treatment is indicated. Imaging findings depend on the schwannoma size. Small schwannomas appear

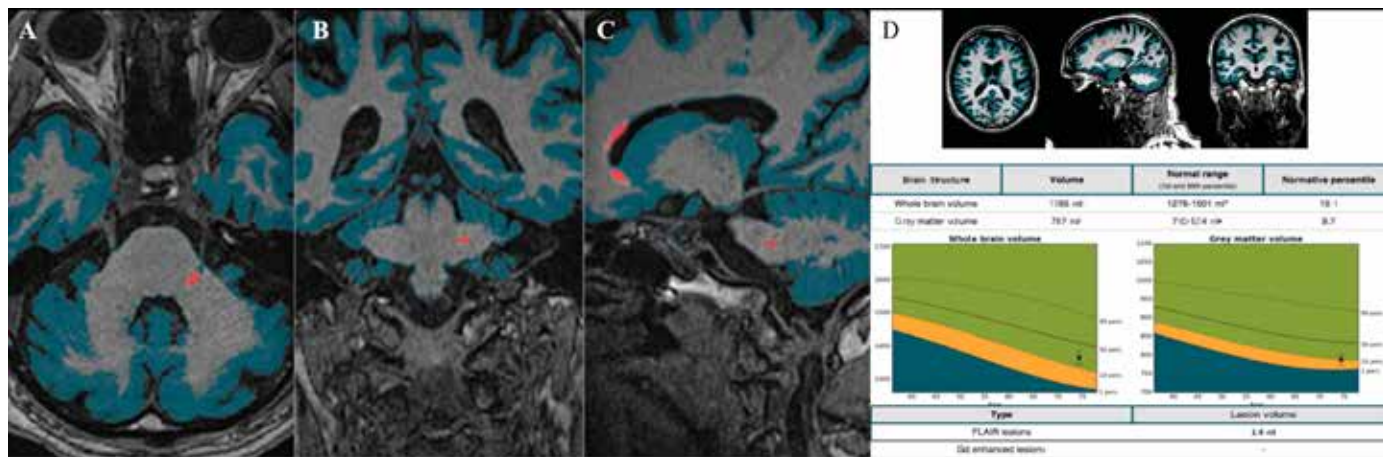
homogeneously iso- or hypointense on T1- and T2-weighted images with avid enhancement after intravenous gadolinium administration. However, when they become larger, they show heterogeneous signal due to intratumoral necrosis or haemorrhage. Magnetic Resonance Cisternography is important for the proper assessment of the cisternal segment of the trigeminal nerve (Figure 22). CT scan is complementary to MRI in cases of bone erosions i.e., petrous apex erosion [133].

Quantitative MRI Volumetry and Dynamic Contrast-Enhanced (DCE) perfusion may be indicated for follow-up of trigeminal schwannoma after gamma knife stereotactic radiosurgery [134].

### Conclusion

Headache is one of the most common clinical manifestations of neurological patients. Thorough neurological examination, recognition of red flags and worrisome features, as well as detailed patient history-taking help the clinician classify headache as primary or secondary, according to the ICDH-III. The optimal neuroimaging methods and protocols for headache diagnosis should be decided on an individual patient basis depending on the clinical suspicion of underlying headache causes. Overall, MRI is preferred for the delineation of underlying brain pathology in patients presenting with headache, with the exception of subarachnoid haemorrhage that necessitates performance of CT in the acute setting, as CT is characterized by higher sensitivity compared

**Figure 22.** A 74-years-old male with trigeminal neuralgia secondary to MS. On the axial (A), coronal (B) and sagittal (C) plane a pontine lesion in the left intrapontine fascicular part of the trigeminal nerve is noted (red colour) corresponding to a linear demyelinating plaque with associated trigeminal nerve atrophy. Images (A), (B) and (C) are derived after whole brain volumetric analysis using artificial intelligence and segmentation of grey, white matter, CSF and lesions. (D) Whole brain quantitative volumetry did not indicate brain atrophy, since the volume of the whole brain and grey matter are within the normal range for the age and sex of the examinee, while 1.4ml lesion load on FLAIR images were calculated with no enhancing lesion



to MRI in the acute phase for detecting subarachnoid haemorrhage. In conclusion, conventional and advanced MRI techniques provide invaluable information regarding the underlying aetiology of secondary headaches and comprise indispensable tools in clinical practice for treatment planning and follow-up of patients suffering from secondary headache.

#### Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest

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