



# Effective Health Care

## Neuroimaging for Headaches

### Nomination Summary Document

#### Results of Topic Selection Process & Next Steps

- Neuroimaging for headaches will go forward for refinement as a systematic review. The scope of this topic, including populations, interventions, comparators, and outcomes, will be further developed in the refinement phase.
- When key questions have been drafted, they will be posted on the AHRQ Web site and open for public comment. To sign up for notification when this and other Effective Health Care (EHC) Program topics are posted for public comment, please go to <http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/index.cfm/join-the-email-list1/>.

#### Topic Description

**Nominator:** Health care professional association

**Nomination Summary:** The nominator asks given what set of signs, symptoms, and patient characteristics is neuroimaging safe to defer in adults, adolescents, and children presenting in primary care with headache. The nominator also indicates that a comparison of generalized neuroimaging versus more selective imaging based on symptoms should be examined. A comparison of the different neuroimaging possibilities, such as x-ray, CT with and without contrast, MRI, and PET scans, should be included.

##### Staff-Generated PICO

**Population(s):** Adults and children presenting in primary care with headaches

**Intervention(s):** Neuroimaging to detect underlying pathology causing headache

**Comparator(s):** Clinical evaluation without neuroimaging; comparative effectiveness of different neuroimaging techniques (xray, CT with and without contrast, MRI, and PET scans)

**Outcome(s):** Detection of underlying pathology, cost

**Key Questions from Nominator:**

1. When is neuroimaging indicated for headache?
2. Given what set of signs and symptoms and patient characteristics is neuroimaging safe to defer in a patient presenting in primary care with headache?

#### Considerations

- The topic meets all EHC Program selection criteria. (For more information, see <http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/index.cfm/submit-a-suggestion-for-research/how-are-research-topics-chosen/>.)

- Headache is a common disorder with many potential causes in both adults and children. There is uncertainty about when neuroimaging should be used to diagnose any underlying conditions associated with headaches. Detection of significant and treatable lesions that impact quality of life remains the primary reason to obtain a neuroimaging study.
- No recent review was identified that covers the full scope of this nomination, and sufficient literature exists to warrant a review on this topic. Therefore, this topic will move forward as a new systematic review.