

Advice Note: Headaches in children

Dear GP,

Thank you for referring this patient with chronic headaches. Based on the information provided, we do not think that this patient requires an outpatient specialist review at this point in time.

Headaches are very common in children and adolescents. Recurrent severe headaches are reported in 20% of children 4-18 years of age and over 90% of teenagers report a history of headaches.

Significant underlying pathology is rare. Sinister features include :

- Localised pain
- Night waking
- Onset on rising
- Associated vomiting
- Increasing frequency and severity

Clinical assessment is the most effective screening procedure in children with headaches. A “headache diary” is helpful in gaining details of triggering factors, the impact on activities and the effectiveness of the medications. Vast majority of patients present with a clear history of tension headaches, migraines or mixed type headaches.

For assessment and management of these, **including paediatric migraine prophylaxis**, please refer to healthpathways “Headaches in children” in the Neurology section under Child and Young Person Health

<https://3d.healthpathways.org.nz/index.htm>

Please **refer acutely for assessment by** calling the paediatric registrar on call via switchboard if any of the **red flags** are present:

- Seizures
- Meningism or neck stiffness
- Hypertension
- Abnormal neurological examination, including papilledema
- Confusion / impaired consciousness

Please re-refer to our outpatient department if any of these concerning features are present:

- Constant unifocal headache
- Escalating headache (frequency or severity)
- Night or early morning waking secondary to headaches with or without vomiting
- Pain with coughing, laughing, sneezing, toileting or exertion
- Unexplained change in behaviour or loss of skills
- Patient < 5 years of age

Further information on assessment and management of children with chronic headaches can be found on <https://www.starship.org.nz/guidelines/headaches-in-childhood>

Kind regards,

Hutt Paediatric Team