

Headache in Childhood Pathway

Clinical Assessment/Management tool for Children with Headache



Emergency department, primary care and community settings

Green Action

Headache history consistent with the most common childhood headache types **WITHOUT RED** features

Tension type headache

Migraine – with/without aura

Analgesic overuse headache
(analgesia >3 x week for > 3 months)

Non-medical management

- Simple headache advice. Increase fluid intake, regular meals, good sleep hygiene, reduce caffeine, reduce screen time, increase exercise
- Keep analgesia to a minimum (less than 3 times a week)
- Explore psychosocial factors/ stressors
- Encourage parents/child to keep a headache diary
- Book a routine optician appointment

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/headaches-in-children/>

<https://www.migrainetrust.org/living-with-migraine/coping-managing/>

Amber Action

Persistent headache unresponsive to initial advice/treatment but no red flags.

Side-effects of medications limit increasing the medication to an effective dose

Psychological factors that interfere with management

Child age <12 with any persistent headache, no red flags.



Non-urgent referral to general paediatrics

Examination red flags

- **Abnormal growth parameters**
- **Signs of early or delayed puberty**
- **High blood pressure**
- **Head tilt/torticollis**
- **Focal neurological deficits –limb weakness, cranial nerve palsies**
- **Visual loss, papilloedema**
- **Ataxia/ motor regression in a younger child**

Red - Urgent Action

Acute headache with fever

Impaired level of consciousness or associated confusion or disorientation

Headache that:

- Is worse overnight or on waking
- Wakes the child from sleep
- Is worse on coughing or straining

Persistent blurred/double vision or new squint

New neurological deficit or symptoms such as weakness/ loss of balance / co-ordination problems / head tilt or gait abnormalities

Vomiting/nausea, especially if early morning or persistent (occurring on most days for 2 or more weeks)

Change in personality / behaviour. Decline in academic performance at school

Child age < 4 years (Headache in this age group is very unusual and may indicate serious underlying pathology)



Immediate, same day referral to general paediatrics