Choosing Wisely and Consumer Reports: Helping Patients make Smart Decisions

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2016
Consumer Reports is a partner in the Choosing Wisely campaign:

- CR supports the effort by creating patient-friendly materials based on the society recommendations.
  - These are developed in both easy to read English and Spanish.
  - Written in coordination with the medical societies.
- CR engages a coalition of consumer communication partners to disseminate content and messages about appropriate use to the communities they serve.

Tools and resources can be found at:
www.consumerhealthchoices.org.
Consumer Partners
May 2016

Consumer Reports has engaged over 50 national and regional organizations, all who partner with us to reach over 100 million consumers with our Choosing Wisely health resources.

Some samples below:

- **Business Groups**, including National Business Group on Health, Pacific Business Group on Health
- **National Media**: AARP, Wikipedia, Univision
- **Unions**: SEIU, Union Plus
- **Public Health / Community**: LA County Dept. of Public Health, VNA Community Health
- **Regional Collaboratives**: Healthcare Collaborative of Greater Columbus, Maine Quality Counts
- **Consumer Groups**: National Partnership for Women and Families, National Center for Farmworker Health
- **Medical Societies**: American College of Physicians, American Society for Echocardiography
- **Healthcare Software vendors**: iTriage, Stanson Health
- **Cost Transparency Vendors**: Castlight Health, Health Sparq
- **Health Plans**: Kaiser, Group Health
Consumer Reports has developed many Choosing Wisely resources to help inform and empower consumers in their decision-making processes around health issues:

- Posters (6+)
- Videos and TV/Radio PSAs (14+)
- Wallet cards
- Brochures (100+)
- E-hubs (5)
- Microsites
- Newsletter
- And more…

Most are available in Plain English & Spanish. Some can be co-branded. All are free to use and distribute!
Consumer-Facing Choosing Wisely Brochures

- 100+ campaign topics
- Specialty society endorsed
- All in Plain English and Spanish
- Support conversations
- PDFs, for easy printing
- Suited for email, linking, hosting
- Suited for clinic display/handouts
- Great for social media posting

Allergy tests
When you need them—and when you don’t

Allergy tests may help find allergies to things you eat, touch, or breathe in. They are usually skin or blood tests.

However, allergy tests alone are generally not enough. It is important to have a doctor’s exam and medical history first to help diagnose allergies. If the exam and medical history point to allergies, allergy tests may help find what you are allergic to. But if you don’t have symptoms and you haven’t had a medical exam that points to an allergy, you should think twice about allergy testing. Here’s why:

Allergy tests, without a doctor’s exam, usually are not reliable.
Many drugstores and supermarkets offer free screenings. And you can even buy kits to test for allergies yourself at home. But the results of these tests may be misleading.
- The tests may say you have an allergy when you do not. This is called a "false positive."
- These free tests and home tests for food allergies are not always reliable.

Unreliable test results can lead to unnecessary changes in your lifestyle.
If the test says you are allergic to some foods, such as wheat, soy, eggs, or milk, you may stop eating those foods. You may end up with a poor diet,

unnecessary worries and frustration, or extra food costs. If the test says you are allergic to cats or dogs, you may give up a loved pet.

And tests for chronic hives—red, itchy, raised areas of the skin that last for more than six weeks—can show something that may not look normal but is not a problem. However, this can lead to anxiety, more tests, and referrals to specialists.
Imaging for Low-Back Pain

X-rays, CT scans, and MRIs are called imaging tests because they take pictures, or images, deep in the inside of the body. You may think you need one of these tests to find out what is causing your back pain. But these tests usually do not help. Here’s why:

The tests do not help you feel better faster. Most people with low-back pain feel better in about a month, whether or not they have an imaging test.

People who get an imaging test for their back pain do not get better faster. And sometimes they feel worse than people who took over-the-counter pain medicine and followed simple steps, like walking, to help their pain.

Imaging tests can also lead to surgery and other treatments that you do not need. In one study, people who had an MRI were much more likely to have surgery than people who did not have an MRI. But the surgery did not help them get better any faster.

Imaging test have risks.

X-rays and CT scans use radiation. Radiation has harmful effects that can add up. It is best to avoid radiation when you can.

Imaging tests are expensive. The chart below shows the costs of imaging tests according to HealthCareBlueBook.com. Why waste money on tests when they do not help your pain? And if the tests lead to surgery, the costs can be much higher.

When are imaging tests a good idea?

In some cases you may need an imaging test right away. Talk to your doctor if you have back pain with any of the following symptoms:

- Weight loss that you cannot explain
- Fever over 102°F
- Loss of control of your bowel or bladder
- Loss of feeling or strength in your legs
- Problems with your reflexes
- A history of cancer

These symptoms can be signs of nerve damage or a serious problem such as cancer or an infection in the spine.

If you do not have any of these symptoms, we recommend waiting a few weeks. Before you have a test, try the self-care steps in the blue box.

Advice from Consumer Reports

How to treat lower-back pain

Many people get over lower-back pain in a few weeks by following these self-care steps.

Stay active. Walking is a good way to ease lower-back pain. If you stay in bed, it can take longer to get better. If you stay in bed more than a day or two, you can get stiff, weak, and even depressed. Get up and move.

Use heat. Heat relaxes your muscles. Try a heating pad, electric blanket, warm bath, or shower.

Take over-the-counter medicines. To help relieve pain and reduce swelling, try pain relievers or drugs that reduce swelling (called anti-inflammatory drugs). Remember, generic medicines cost less than brand names, but work just as well.

- Generic acetaminophen (brand name Tylenol)
- Generic ibuprofen (brand name Advil)
- Generic naproxen (brand name Aleve)

Sleep on your side or on your back. Lie on your side with a pillow between your knees. Or lie on your back with one or more pillows under your knees.

Talk to your doctor. If your pain is very bad, ask about prescription pain medicines. If they do not help within a few days, talk with your doctor again. Ask if the pain might be caused by a serious health problem.

Find out about other ways to treat back pain. If you still have pain after a few weeks, you may want to ask your doctor about other treatments for lower-back pain. Treatments include:

- Physical therapy
- Chiropractic care
- Acupuncture
- Yoga
- Massage
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy
- Progressive muscle relaxation

Find out if your health insurance pays for any of these treatments.

Surgery is a last choice. Surgery usually does not help very much. It has risks, and it costs a lot. Think about surgery only if other treatments do not help your pain.
Imaging for Headaches

CT scans and MRIs are called imaging tests because they take pictures, or images, of the inside of the body. Many people who have very painful headaches want a CT scan or an MRI. They want to find out if their headaches are caused by a serious problem, such as a brain tumor. But most of the time you don’t need these tests. This is why:

Imaging tests rarely help.

Doctors see many patients for headaches. And most of them have migraines or headaches caused by tension. Both kinds of headaches can be very painful, but a CT scan or an MRI rarely shows why the headache occurs. And they do not help you ease the pain.

A doctor can diagnose most headaches during an office visit. The doctor asks you questions about your health and your symptoms. This is called a medical history. Then the doctor does a test of your reflexes, called a neurological exam. If your medical history and exam are normal, imaging tests usually will not show a serious problem.

CT scans have risks.

A CT scan of the head uses a low radiation dose. This may slightly increase the risk of harmful effects. Risks from radiation exposure may add up, so it is best to avoid unnecessary radiation. The results of your test may also be unclear. This can lead to more tests and even treatment that you do not need.

Imaging tests cost money.

The chart below shows how much it may cost for a CT scan or an MRI of the brain according to HealthMarkets.com. A CT scan or MRI with dye makes the images clearer. Costs of an unnecessary scan may be higher if the results are unclear and your doctor orders more tests or treatment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imaging Test</th>
<th>Typical Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CT scan</td>
<td>$340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT scan with dye</td>
<td>$840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRI</td>
<td>$560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRI with dye</td>
<td>$970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When should you have an imaging test for headaches?

In some cases you might need a CT scan or an MRI. You might need one if your doctor cannot diagnose your headache based on your exam and medical history. Or you might need one if the exam finds something that is not normal.

You may not need a CT scan or an MRI if you have unusual headaches. See your doctor right away:

- You have headaches that are sudden or feel like something is buzzing inside your head.
- Your headaches are different from other headaches you’ve had, especially if you are age 50 or older.
- Your headaches happen after you have been physically active.
- You have headaches with other serious symptoms, such as a loss of control, a seizure or fit, or a change in speech or alertness.

Advice from Consumer Reports

How to treat a headache

You can help most headaches by taking these steps:

Avoid triggers. Triggers are events that can cause headaches. These tips can help you avoid triggers:

If you have migraines:

- Wear tinted glasses in bright light.
- Do not skip meals.
- Avoid alcohol, meat with added nitrites (such as cold cuts) and aged cheeses (hard, dry cheeses such as parmesan).

If you have tension headaches:

- Avoid getting overtired.
- Hold your back and neck straight when you sit or stand.
- Keep your jaw relaxed (not clenched).
- Quit smoking. Smoking can bring on either kind of headache.

Manage stress. Try relaxation, yoga, stretching, or other activities that can help you relax.

Get plenty of sleep. Aim for six to eight hours of sleep each night. Set a regular time to go to bed and to wake up. Avoid watching TV or using a computer just before you go to bed.

Get plenty of exercise. Regular exercise, such as brisk walking, swimming, or cycling, can reduce stress and ease both kinds of headaches.

Non-prescription pain medicines can help.

- Tylenol (generic acetaminophen), Advil (generic Ibuprofen), Aleve (generic naproxen), or Excedrin Migraine (a combination of aspirin, ibuprofen, and caffeine). You can buy all of these without a prescription. The generic versions, including store brands, cost less and are just as safe and effective as the brand-name pills.
- Pain relief does not take any of these pills more than once or twice a week. Overuse can make headaches worse and cause side effects.

To help severe migraines, ask your doctor about these prescription drugs:

- Triptans such as Imitrex (generic sumatriptan)
- Maxalt (generic rizatriptan)
- Beta-blockers, such as Inderal (generic propranolol)
Questions to Ask Your Doctor Before You Get Any Test, Treatment, or Procedure

1. Do I really need this test or procedure?
2. What are the risks and side effects?
3. Are there simpler, safer options?
4. What happens if I don’t do anything?
5. How much does it cost, and will my insurance pay for it?

Some medical tests, treatments, and procedures may not help you. And some of them might cause harm.

Use these 5 questions to talk to your doctor about which tests, treatments, and procedures you need — and which you don’t need.
Ex. Low-Back Pain:
Cultural Relevance, addresses multiple audiences; multiple access points

Imaging tests for lower-back pain
You probably do not need an X-ray, CT scan, or MRI

X-rays, CT scans, and MRIs are called imaging tests because they take pictures or images of the inside of the body. You might think you need one of these tests when you are having lower back pain. But these tests usually don’t help. Here’s why.

The tests do not help you feel better faster.

Most people who lose lower-back pain within a month, whether or not they have an imaging test.

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Does your lower back hurt? You probably don’t need an MRI, CT scan, or X-ray.

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Here’s why:

- They won’t help you feel better any faster.
- They have risks, including exposure to radiation.
- They aren’t cheap.

What can you do to feel better? Five easy ideas.
How do we reach consumers and patients?

Social media

Web

EMR’s

Employers

Providers offices
Welcome to the Choosing Wisely Implementation Guide

Here's all you need to know to launch your own consumer-facing Choosing Wisely campaign.

Whether you’re talking with your neighbors, co-workers, patients, employees or customers, we have distilled the lessons, learned by others, into a series of easy steps.

- **Starting a campaign** — Begin with the 5 Questions.
- **Tools and techniques: For communities** — How to talk with your friends and neighbors about avoiding medical overuse.
- **Tools and techniques: For health systems** — What to say to your patients, how, where and when.
- **Tools and techniques: For employers** — Help your workers use their health-care dollars effectively.
- **Topical themes** — Start with the health issues that matter most to you.
- **Media outreach** — How to get the word out, through traditional and social media.
- **Additional resources** — Consumer Reports has a lot to offer, and so do our partners and collaborators.
- **Fine print** — Please check the legal terms covering your use of Choosing Wisely materials.

Contact us.
Co-Branded Microsites

A place to send your audience (patients, members, providers, colleagues, etc) to read, watch, or download a subset of our Choosing Wisely materials.

- No cost
- Co-branded
- Analytics provided
Platform for Patients’ Stories

Why Won’t Doctors Accept Each Other’s X-rays?
On 2 Nov, 2015
“This lack of communication is a deep problem in our healthcare system, and it exposed me to harm and wasted my insurance company's money.”

Read More →

I Never Questioned the Safety of Having MRIs With Contrast
On 7 Oct, 2015
“I know that all of my doctors were looking out for my best interest and prescribing the tests they thought necessary.”

Read More →

Another Day, Another Doctor, but the Same Tests
On 21 Sep, 2015
“Why did they need to keep repeating the same tests so many times within such a short timeframe?”

Read More →

Why Test for a Condition you Don’t Intend to Treat?
On 8 Sep, 2015
“In my dad's case, ... even if the results did show cancer, he had already decided that he wouldn't treat it.”

Read More →
What’s Next?

• Shifting focus to medical practices.
  – Partnering with several pilot practices, developing tools and techniques to help promote Choosing Wisely and educate patients in a practice setting.
  – Goal is to inform patients at the point of care.

• Increasing Social Media efforts
  – CR is developing a “crowd sourcing” initiative. Focus is on the 5-questions to ask your doctor collateral.
  – Attempting to gain patient “champions”, willing to ask the questions to their provider and share their story with us.

• Focus on Antibiotic reduction
  – One of CR’s strategic priorities is reduction of overuse of Antibiotics, with a focus on patient safety.
  – We are in the early stages of developing our milestones, which will have a 3 – 5 year timeline.
Questions?

**Website:** ConsumerHealthChoices.org

**Facebook:** https://www.facebook.com/ConsumerHealthChoices

**Vimeo:** http://vimeopro.com/consumerhealthchoices/portfolio

**Twitter:** @DomL_health

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