



Red Flags in case history taking

Red Flags

- What are red flags?



Systems Inquiry

Red Flags

These are signs or symptoms, which, when viewed either in isolation or within the context of the whole consultation, may indicate a serious pathology requiring special attention or urgent referral.

Red Flags

- How can you determine when a particular sign, symptom or other clinical finding may be considered as a 'red flag'?



Red Flags

The presence of blood

In the vomit

In the stools

A more
definitive
red flag

Red flag
Case history
dependant



Red Flags

Paraesthesiae in a limb



**Resolves with
changes in
posture**



Not a
Red Flag



**Persistent
+ muscle weakness
+ wasting**



A Red Flag

Red Flags

- Identify general or non system-specific red flags?
- Associate these red flags with possible serious pathologies.



Systems Inquiry

Non system specific Red Flags

- Cachexia.
- Unexplained persistent loss of appetite.
- Sudden weight changes.
- Unexplained persistent fatigue.
- Recurrent or persistent fevers and night sweats.
- Night pain.
- Unexplained persistent aches and pains.
- Unexplained rashes or changes in skin lesions.
- Unexplained swellings and lumps.
- Heavy, persistent, recurrent, or unexplained bleeding or bruising.



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Non system-specific Red Flags

Also consider as red flags:

- Any history of cancer.
- Recent travel to an epidemic region.
- Accidental ingestion of suspect or known toxic substances.
- Trauma esp. to head and abdomen.

Red Flags

1. Identify red flags for the cardiovascular system.
2. What serious pathologies could these red flags be indicative of?



Systems Inquiry

Red Flags - The cardiovascular system

- ▶ Angina not relieved by rest, or medication.
- ▶ Abnormally severe chest pain, and angina pain radiating to the jaw or to the arms.
- ▶ Dyspnoea.
- ▶ Haemoptysis.
- ▶ Malignant hypertension or very low blood pressure.
- ▶ Abnormally cool, sweaty, or moist upper back.



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Red Flags - The cardiovascular system

- ▶ Oedema.
- ▶ Cyanosis (central or acute peripheral).
- ▶ Painful, hot, swollen calf muscles.
- ▶ Rapid trophic changes to the skin.
- ▶ Frothy sputum, with or without blood.
- ▶ Previous history of heart disease or stroke.

Red Flags

1. Identify red flags for the respiratory system.
2. What serious pathologies could these red flags be indicative of?



The Respiratory System

Respiratory system red flags

- Haemoptysis.
- Dyspnoea.
- Shoulder pain aggravated by lying supine.
- Chest and shoulder pain that is relieved by lying on the painful side.
- Cyanosis.
- Hoarseness.
- Persistent or reoccurring cough.
- Neurological disturbances, particularly affecting the medial aspects of the arms.



The Respiratory System

Respiratory system red flags

- Haemoptysis.
- Dyspnoea.
- Shoulder pain aggravated by lying supine.
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- Cyanosis.
- Hoarseness.
- Persistent or reoccurring cough.
- Neurological disturbances, particularly affecting the medial aspects of the arms.

Red Flags

1. Identify red flags for the gastrointestinal system.
2. What serious pathologies could these red flags be indicative of?



Systems Inquiry - GI System

Gastrointestinal system red flags

Acute or persistent abdominal pain accompanied by:

- ▶ Raised pulse rate.
- ▶ Changes to blood pressure.
- ▶ Rigid abdomen.
- ▶ Sweating.
- ▶ Rigors.
- ▶ Guarding.



Systems Inquiry - GI System

Gastrointestinal system red flags

- Dysphagia.
- Jaundice.
- Frank blood or melaena (dark stools).
- Symptoms of anaemia.
- Spider naevi, caput medusae or significant ascites.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Persistent nausea or vomiting.



Systems Inquiry - GI System

Gastrointestinal system red flags

- ▶ Haematuria.
- ▶ Gynaecomastia.
- ▶ Haematemesis.
- ▶ Steatorrhoea.
- ▶ Recent changes in bowel habit.
- ▶ Changes in appetite including early satiety.
- ▶ High alcohol consumption.
- ▶ Long term administration of NSAIDs.
- ▶ History of peptic ulcer or abdominal operations.

Red Flags

1. Identify red flags for the nervous system.
2. What serious pathologies could these red flags be indicative of?



The Nervous System

Nervous system red flags

- Disturbances with smell, vision, hearing and taste.
- Dizziness and vertigo.
- Dysarthria.
- Hoarseness or dysphonia.
- Dysphagia.
- Fainting or loss of consciousness.
- Persistent paresthesia or numbness.



The Nervous System

Nervous system red flags

- Reflex changes.
- Loss of sphincter control.
- Persistent fasciculations, weakness, wasting and spasms.
- Paralysis.
- History of psychiatric disorders including clinical depression and mania.

Red Flags

1. Identify red flags relating to headaches
2. What serious pathologies could these red flags be indicative of?



The Nervous System

Red flags relating to headaches

- Worse at night
- Headaches that wake up the patient
- History of:
 - Head trauma
 - High blood pressure
 - Cerebrovascular accident
 - Glaucoma
 - Temporal arteritis
 - Aneurysms
- Cranial nerve dysfunction

Red Flags

1. Identify red flags for the genitourinary system.
2. What serious pathologies could these red flags be indicative of?



Systems Inquiry

Red flags for the Genito-urinary systems include:

- Haematuria, proteinuria or leucorrhoea.
- Dysuria and anuria.
- History of prostate problems.
- Abnormal changes in colour, odour, volume, flow or frequency of urine.
- Discomfort before, during or after urination.
- Abnormal lumps over the genitals or groin.



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Red flags for the Genito-urinary systems include:

- ▶ Enlarged regional lymph nodes.
- ▶ Vaginal bleeding after menopause, unless on HRT.
- ▶ Perineal pain or fluctuating pain into testes, labia and pelvic area.
- ▶ Breast pain, lumps, skin changes or discharge from nipples?
- ▶ History of renal calculus, pyelonephritis, or trauma to kidney area.

Red Flags

1. Identify red flags for the musculoskeletal system.
2. What serious pathologies could these red flags be indicative of?



Systems Inquiry

Musculoskeletal red flags

- Symptoms lasting longer than expected.
- Chronic back pain together with systemic symptoms, such as fever, rigors, malaise and weight loss.
- Spinal pain together with iritis, skin rashes, urethral discharge and abdominal symptoms.
- Night pain.



Systems Inquiry

Musculoskeletal red flags

- ▶ Constant, unremitting back pain.
- ▶ Bilateral arm or leg pains.
- ▶ Thoracic pain that is persistent or pulsating.
- ▶ Persistent back pain affecting the thoracolumbar region.
- ▶ Unexplained bone pain or fractures.
- ▶ A history of cancer.



Systems Inquiry

Musculoskeletal red flags

- Neurological deficit affecting the saddle area especially associated with sphincter disturbance.
- Pain not responding to simple analgesia.
- Unremitting neurological manifestations including reflex changes, persistent numbness, and paresthesiae.
- Persistent Horner's syndrome, and hoarseness.



Systems Inquiry

Musculoskeletal red flags

- Unexplained or persistent weakness, whether focal or generalised.
- Muscle wasting and fasciculations.
- Prolonged administration of systemic steroids.
- Unsteadiness or loss of balance.
- A warm tender calf muscle.
- Warm, tender, swollen joints and fever especially in a child.

Red Flags

1. Identify red flags for the skin.
2. What serious pathologies could these red flags be indicative of?



The skin, nails and hairs

Red flags for the skin

For pigmented lesions - **ABCDE**

Asymmetry

Border irregularity

Colour variation

Diameter exceeding 6 mm

Elevation and **E**nlargement



The skin, nails and hairs

Red flags for the skin

Glasgow 7-point check for skin malignancies



Major criteria:

- Change in size
- Change in shape
- Change in colour



Minor criteria:

- Diameter > 6 mm
- Inflammation
- Oozing or bleeding
- Mild itch or altered sensation



End
Red Flags