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## More progress in the quest for a “painometer”

[Tracie White](#) on December 17th, 2012 [1 Comment](#)



A new method of using brain scans to determine whether a patient has chronic lower back pain proved successful 76 percent of the time in a new study from Stanford researchers. The work appears online today in the journal [Cerebral Cortex](#) (subscription required), and the hope is this new tool could someday provide an objective measurement for chronic pain, something akin to a “painometer.”

The new method uses advanced computer algorithms to analyze magnetic resonance imaging scans of the brain to provide an objective measurement of chronic pain. While not yet ready for primetime, its success so far makes it appear promising, according to [Sean Mackey](#), MD, PhD, chief of the [Division of Pain Medicine](#) and senior author of the study. As he told me for the [press release](#) I wrote:

People have been looking for an objective pain detector — a ‘pain scanner’ — for a long time. We’re still a long way from that, but this method may someday augment self-reporting as the primary way of determining whether a patient is in chronic pain.

The need for additional methods for measuring chronic pain beyond the gold standard of self-reporting has long been acknowledged, particularly for the very young and very old who may have difficulty communicating. In a past [story](#) I wrote about a similar study by Mackey and colleagues, [Hank Greely](#), JD, a Stanford law professor, said such a tool has the potential to be a “godsend” to the legal system.

Previously: [Relieving Pain in America: A new report from the Institute of Medicine](#), [Stanford’s Sean Mackey discusses recent advances in pain research and treatment](#) and [Oh what a pain; Stanford scientists work toward developing a “painometer”](#)

Photo by [Beautiful Insanity Photography](#)



### One Response to “More progress in the quest for a “painometer” ”

1. *david* Says:

[December 20th, 2012 at 10:13 am](#)

This is not progress- this is regressive for it is part of the prejudice to blame pain on a defective mind. dr Mackey has to admit his profession has failed to find pathology in most people with back pain.

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