

## Are we closer to determining what a 'conscious brain' looks like?

Most of the time, it's easy to tell when someone is consciously aware. But there are many tragic cases when it's unclear whether a person who is unresponsive after a serious brain injury is truly no longer conscious. That ambiguity can raise ethical questions about how to manage or ultimately end such a person's life-sustaining care.

A new study out [February 6] doesn't provide any clear answers to those questions, but its findings might someday help us objectively track consciousness in unresponsive people, through their patterns of brain activity.

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Based on the fMRI results, they found four distinct patterns of neural activity thought to be related to cognition.

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The highly complex pattern 1, they found, was most likely to show up in completely awake healthy volunteers, while the least complex pattern, pattern 4, was most common in completely unresponsive patients (patterns 2 and 3 showed up at the same frequency in all groups). But people in a minimally conscious state also showed pattern 1 more often than people in a vegetative state.

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All of these subtle distinctions, the authors said, could mean there are ways to tell apart the mostly unaware from the fully unaware.

**Read full, original post:** [Scientists Come Closer to Finding Out What Consciousness Looks Like in the Brain](#)