

Surely I need a scan to tell me what's wrong with my long standing back pain?

- The information we get from MRI scans is often unhelpful in treating long standing pain (pain that has persisted for longer than 3 months).
- Doctors and health care professionals are trained to recognise patterns of pain which indicate when an MRI scan may be useful.
- Scans tell us nothing about how fit, tight, weak and sensitive our body's tissues have become. These are often reasons for ongoing pain.
- Even with modern techniques and knowledge there is often no immediate cure for chronic pain. However, there are many ways to help manage the condition.
- Your health care professional can discuss techniques, strategies and resources that maybe useful to help manage your problem.

Helpful resources

www.britishpainsociety.org

www.chronicpain.org

<http://www.nhsphysiosussex.org.uk/>

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'Spinal Pain When is the right time for an MRI?'



What is an MRI scan?



Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) allows us to look inside the body.

It is considered a very safe way of producing images that can help diagnose medical conditions.

The scanner uses a high-strength magnet, radio waves and computers to create the images.

What does it show?

- MRI scans are extremely sensitive and unlike X-rays which only show bones MRI scans show bones and soft tissues such as muscles, ligaments and discs.

BUT

- Research has shown that many of the findings on MRI scans are often found in people without pain.
- It is normal to have an element of wear and tear or changes to some of the muscles, ligaments or discs as we get older.

- One study found that up to 90% of healthy people over the age of 60 were reported to have changes to their spinal discs on MRI. It is not an indication that there is something wrong with the spine.
- While MRI provides excellent pictures of your body structure, it may not be able to pinpoint the specific source of your pain.

When do I need a scan?

MRI for spinal pain should only be used when:

- A serious condition is suspected. Less than 1% of all back pain is due to serious disease or injury.
- If symptoms of numbness and weakness in the legs or arms are getting worse despite treatment.
- If the results of the scan are likely to change your options for treatment.

Thorough examination can determine the best course of management and whether you require a scan.

Is something seriously wrong?

- Spinal pain is very common, with 80% of people experiencing pain in their backs at least once in their lifetimes.
- Most new spinal pain will get better on its own within 12 weeks.
- Less than 1% of all back pain is due to serious disease or injury.
- Research suggests there is no relationship between the level of pain you feel and the severity of your condition.
- Health care professionals such as physiotherapists and doctors are specifically trained to identify spinal pain from serious causes.
- Special questions and a thorough physical examination are very effective for identifying serious causes of back pain.
- Sometimes blood tests can be a helpful part of the examination process.