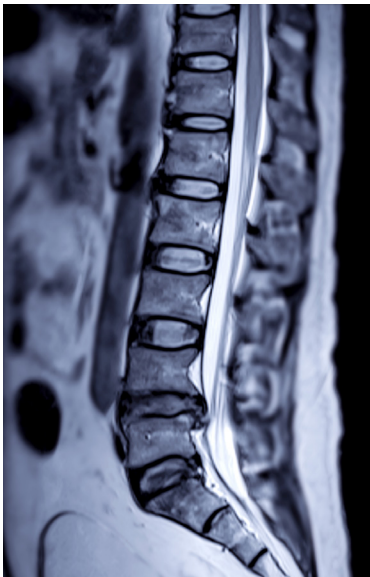


## Lumbar Spine

Low back pain is very common, and in most cases, it improves with time, activity, and simple treatments like exercise or physiotherapy. An MRI is usually not needed for typical back pain, even when it's quite uncomfortable.

An MRI of the lumbar spine is most useful when your doctor suspects a specific diagnosis — such as nerve compression causing significant leg weakness, loss of bladder or bowel control, or when symptoms don't improve after several weeks of treatment. It may also be recommended if there's concern about infection, fracture, or malignancy.



Interior Health would like to recognize and acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Däkelh Dené, Ktunaxa, Nlaka'pamux, Secwépemc, St'át'imc, syilx, and T̓silhqot'in Nations where we live, learn, collaborate and work together.

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## Do I need an MRI?

**Appropriateness Guidelines  
for MRI of the Shoulder,  
Knee, Hip and Lumbar Spine**



## Interior Health

Health and well-being for all.

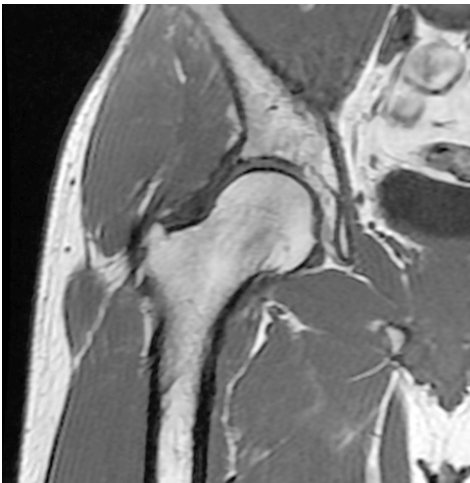
## Should your doctor order an MRI?

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) of the hip, knee, shoulder, and lower back are among the most requested scans, but they aren't always needed. When MRIs are ordered unnecessarily, it can increase wait times for patients who truly need the test. **So, when do you need an MRI and when is it unnecessary?**

### Hip

If your X-ray already shows moderate to severe osteoarthritis (OA) in your hip, or if your doctor thinks your symptoms and age point to OA, an MRI usually won't change your treatment plan.

An MRI may be useful when arthritis is not seen on x-ray. If an MRI is required, the first step would be obtaining an image guided anesthetic injection of the hip joint. This usually is decided upon by a specialist rather than a family physician.



### Knee

If an X-ray already shows osteoarthritis OA, or if your doctor believes your symptoms and age suggest OA, an MRI probably will not add any additional information. OA can cause significant pain, but an MRI typically does not change how it is treated.



An MRI may be helpful when there has been a recent injury or when your specialist suspects intra-articular damage that requires further imaging. An orthopedic surgeon may also order an MRI to assist in surgical planning.



### Shoulder

An X-ray is usually done as the first step in assessing shoulder pain. In many cases, an ultrasound is the best test to check for rotator cuff pathology after an x-ray is done. If ultrasound is not available, an MRI may be indicated if the x-rays reveal no OA.

If you have shoulder pain without a recent injury, an MRI usually is not recommended. In some cases an MRI is required after an ultrasound, but this would be decided upon by your specialist and not your family doctor.

In addition to rotator cuff pathology, an MRI is used for diagnosing tumours in the soft tissues or bone.