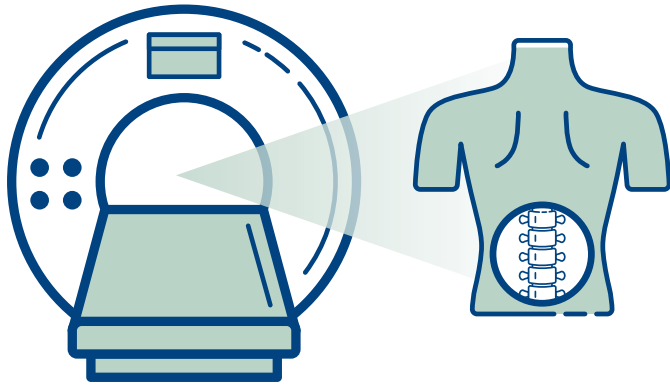


LOW BACK PAIN AND MRI SCANS



What is an MRI scan?

MRI is a safe way of producing detailed images of the tissues inside of your body

Will an MRI show the cause of my back pain?

- No, the underlying cause of back pain cannot usually be pin pointed on MRI
- Even people without back pain commonly have MRI 'changes', such as disc bulges or degeneration
- These 'changes' often can be seen from your twenties and become more common the older you get. They are rarely anything to worry about

Should I get an MRI 'just in case'?

No, unnecessary MRIs have some risks:

- Changes on MRI are often seen and may cause stress, anxiety and worry, even though they are usually unimportant
- MRIs have been associated with worse patient outcomes
- MRIs for back pain usually don't change your treatment options
- Unnecessary MRI scans can cause a delay in you accessing appropriate treatment

Do I need an MRI scan if I have severe back pain?

- Lots of research shows that strong pain does not equal a bad injury
- Healthcare professionals such as Doctors or Physiotherapists are specifically trained to assess back pain and determine if you need an MRI

MRIs for back pain may be considered if:

- You also have symptoms of pain, numbness or weakness in the legs e.g. 'sciatica' and they are severe or not improving despite treatment
- Your healthcare professional notes any concerning signs, after they take a clinical history and ask special questions. However, this is very rare. Less than 1 in 100 people with low back pain have a serious medical cause for their pain

Further Information about improving your back pain:

- NHS Inform – Back Problems: [Back problems - Muscle, bone and joint injuries | NHS inform](#)
- NHS Lothian Low Back Pain Website: [Lower Back Pain \(nhslothian.scot\)](#)

How common are disc bulges in people with no pain?

Disc bulges are very common in people with no pain and become more common with increasing age.

