

# Do I Need an MRI Scan?

- Usually not recommended Within the First Six Weeks
- Abnormalities shown on the MRI scan are often not actually be the cause of back pain.
- Numerous studies have shown that approximately 30% of people in their thirties and forties have a lumbar disc herniation on their MRI scan, although they do not have any back pain. There are many such normal findings that can sound scary.

Indications for when to get an MRI scan include:

- After 4 to 6 weeks of **leg pain**, if the pain is severe enough to warrant surgery
- After 3 to 6 months of back pain, if the pain is severe enough to warrant surgery
- If the back pain is accompanied by constitutional symptoms (such as loss of appetite, weight loss, fever, chills, shakes, or severe pain when at rest) that may indicate that the pain is due to a tumor or an infection
- Persistent unrelenting back pain not changed by body position. (No position makes it better or worse)
- For patients who may have **spinal stenosis** and are considering an epidural injection to alleviate pain
- For patients who have not done well after having **back surgery**, specifically if their pain does not improve after 4 to 6 weeks.

Another important consideration with MRI scans is the timing of when the scan is done.

The only time an MRI scan is needed immediately is when a patient has either:

- Bowel or bladder incontinence
- Progressive weakness in the legs due to nerve damage.

Early and inappropriate ordering of MRI scans can **prolong your recovery** by common misinterpretation of normal findings, driving needless clinical testing and possibly unnecessary treatment that have inherent risks.