



The Spine & MRI Scans

Do you have back or neck pain?

Have you been told or feel you need a scan?

If this is the case then you may find this information useful.



The Detail:

MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) is an investigation that has been used since the beginning of the 1980s.

The MRI scan uses magnetic and radio waves, meaning that there is no exposure to x-rays or any other damaging forms of radiation.

There are no known dangers or side effects connected to an MRI scan. The test is not painful; you cannot feel it. Since radiation is not used, the procedure can be repeated without problems. The machine tends to be loud and enclosing, which a lot of people find uncomfortable. As the MRI uses magnetic and radio waves, you need to remove any metal before doing in.

What You Need to Know

MRI scans give a very clear picture of the structure of the spine, and an MRI scan can be used at various other points throughout the body. However, they do not always tell us why the spine is painful. In 85% of patients we are unable to say with certainty why back pain occurs. In such cases, it is often more useful to concentrate on getting back to normal activities through an exercise programme and appropriate use of medication. MRI scans themselves are not conclusive and their accuracy and reliability have come under question.

The Cause of Most Back Pain is Not Determined by an MRI

Patients can sometimes be quite worried by 'dramatic' descriptions of what scans show and the medical language used. A loss of water content in a disc makes it look darker than others. It can be described as 'degenerative discs', a term that might cause concern, but if it was described as 'normal age-related changes' that would be less frightening. Normal discs will 'bulge', and this is not the same as a disc 'prolapse'. A disc prolapse can sometimes be entirely pain free, but will sometimes cause symptoms.

If the symptoms are not too bad or improving naturally then a scan may not alter the treatment, either now or in the future.