

# Argus Orthopaedic Zone

## Knee MRI. The Facts.

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*Transforming patient information into patient understanding.*

Do you know what MRI stands for? Magnetic Resonance Imaging.

### **MRI Exam Described:**

- The patient is placed in a magnet
- A radio wave is sent in
- The radio wave is turned off
- The patient emits a signal
- The signal is received and used for reconstruction of an image on a computer.

Sounds simple enough, right? In reality as you might imagine, the subject matter is extremely complex and only easy if you have a PhD. in physics! But, I digress. The reason to write this at all is to tell you that many knee MRI's are unnecessary.

Many studies have shown that a large number of patients have already had an MRI exam of the knee before they are referred to an Orthopaedic Surgeon. I see this in the office all the time.

OOPS!

Half of the MRIs were unnecessary for diagnosis that doctors ordered before sending the patient to an Orthopaedic Surgeon.

Why?

Because Orthopaedic Surgeons approach diagnosis of knee problems differently than other physicians.

My diagnosis of a knee's condition typically involves a combination of patient history, physical examination and often plain x-rays.

Orthopaedic Surgeons know how to ask the right questions, do a thorough musculoskeletal exam and order the proper x-rays to make a correct diagnosis.

MRI is very expensive and often unnecessary for diagnosis. Other doctors use it as a **screening tool**, a very expensive one at that. I would prefer to be able to order the MRI personally if I feel it will help in making the diagnosis.

### **Patients Request MRIs**

Patients frequently do not feel they have gotten a thorough exam if I don't order an MRI. To maintain a patient's and family's confidence, I often go into a long explanation of why I don't think they need an MRI.

### **MRI Can Be Useful**

Don't get me wrong here. I order MRIs when I feel it will help confirm a diagnosis of torn knee cartilage for example. But I don't order it simply because the knee hurts or as a screening tool. And most patients with knee arthritis don't need an MRI.

The bottom line is there are appropriate indications for its use, but you have to be aware of the indications!

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Website, Your Orthopaedic Connection, Archive of all previous Argus articles.

Please check it out. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush