

Spine Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Spine Computed Tomography (CT)

Test Request Tip Sheet



With/Without contrast CT, MRI

- The study considered best for a specific clinical scenario should be ordered. The second study should be performed only if the first study does not provide adequate information.

MRI is almost always preferred over CT scan. If ordering CT, clearly document why MRI is not appropriate.

In cases of back pain without “red flags,” six weeks of multi-modality supervised conservative therapy (without significant symptom improvement) must be completed before an imaging study can be approved.

- Clear documentation of all elements of conservative therapy is required, **including** details and dates of physical therapy, home exercise programs, or chiropractic care.
- **Reproducible** neurological deficits must be documented in the clinical notes by a thorough neurological physical examination.
- Choosing Wisely® recommendations are followed for low back pain as shown below.

For more information, visit www.RadMD.com or call **1-888-864-7237**. You can also contact your AmeriHealth Caritas Iowa Provider Network Account Executive or Provider Services at **1-844-411-0579**.

Choosing Wisely Recommendations

As part of Choosing Wisely, each participating specialty society has created lists of “Things Physicians and Patients Should Question” that provide specific, evidence-based recommendations to help physicians and patients make wise decisions about the most appropriate care based on their individual situation. The items below represent the recommendations associated with spine CT and MRI.

- **Don’t perform imaging for low back pain within the first six weeks, unless red flags are present.**
American Academy of Family Physicians
- **Don’t obtain imaging studies in patients with non-specific low back pain.**
American College of Physicians

Radiation exposure

Spine MRI: 0 mSv

Spine CT: 6.5 mSv

Radiation exposure should be limited when possible.

With and without contrast doubles the radiation dose.

Spine Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Spine Computed Tomography (CT) Test Request Tip Sheet

- **Avoid imaging studies (MRI, CT, or X-rays) for acute low back pain without specific indications.**

American Society of Anesthesiologists - Pain Medicine

- **Don't recommend advanced imaging (e.g., MRI) of the spine within the first six weeks in patients with non-specific acute low back pain in the absence of red flags.**

North American Spine Society

Choosing Wisely® is an initiative of the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) Foundation to help physicians and patients engage in conversations about the overuse of tests and procedures and support physician efforts to help patients make smart and effective care choices. Recognizing the importance of physicians and patients working together, leading specialty societies, along with Consumer Reports, have joined Choosing Wisely to help improve the quality and safety of health care in America.

