

MRI Basics: The importance of a high quality MRI

Not all MRI units are alike. The quality of a patient's MRI depends on the several factors. The strength of the magnet; whether it is an open or closed scan; and the protocol set up by the group that manages it determines the final quality of the scan.

After the scan is completed, a copy should be given to the patient on a CD for the patient's physician to review. This is important because the report of the scan can vary from one radiologist to another. The radiologist may not know what the patient's doctor is looking for. Even if they read the scan accurately, if the radiologist is not specialized in spine imaging, they may not focus on the details necessary for the patient's problem. In addition, asymptomatic patients have a high amount of degenerative changes that are not causing symptoms (20-70% depending on age), so without knowing the details of a patient's complaints and physical findings, the MRI report may not be relevant.

It is critical in my opinion that the physician who orders the test should look at the images and review it with the patient. Patients should ask their doctor: Where is the MRI is being done? Is it a high quality scan read by a neuro-radiologist specializing in spine imaging? Am I going to get a copy of it and when you review it and contact me?