



**Essential Imaging**  
BC PATIENT SAFETY & QUALITY COUNCIL

# MRI for Hip and Knee Pain: A Guide for Essential Imaging

**Recommendation: “MRIs of hip or knee joints are not recommended in patients with co-existent pain and moderate to severe osteoarthritis unless red flags are present.”<sup>1</sup>**

The BC Patient Safety & Quality Council has put together these Essential Imaging Conversation Guides for Patients to support and guide conversations with care providers based on the *BC Guidelines for Appropriate Imaging*.<sup>1</sup>

While hip or knee pain can be difficult, generally you don't need an MRI.<sup>2</sup> Here's why:

- The research shows that if you have significant osteoarthritis, there is no benefit to having an MRI.
- Most knee and hip pain problems can be diagnosed by better understanding your symptoms, the location of the pain and what makes the pain better or worse, without an MRI.

## Take Action

Hip and knee pain usually go away when you are provided with a guided exercise program for improving your strength and mobility.

Here are some ways that you can take an active role in your recovery:<sup>2</sup>

- Start by booking an appointment with a physiotherapist to set up a personalized treatment plan
- Joint-friendly physical activity such as walking, swimming or cycling can improve your pain and quality of life
- Try applying heat or cold before activities to help loosen the joints
- Choose appropriate and supportive footwear to help reduce stress to your joints
- Over-the-counter medications can help manage your pain—talk with your care provider about options for treatment and pain management

## Stay Informed

If you are experiencing one of the following, an MRI may be appropriate:<sup>2</sup>

- An MRI is recommended on a previous imaging report
- You've had previous knee or hip surgery
- You have a suspected infection
- Your care provider suspects a tumour
- You have either been previously diagnosed or may have lost some bone tissue (Osteonecrosis)
- You have a fixed/locked knee
- You have had a weight-bearing x-ray in the past six months showing minor or no evidence of osteoarthritis (OA)

## Start the Conversation!

Talk with your care provider about appropriate medical imaging.

Learn more and find additional clinical resources at [BCPSQC.ca/imaging](https://bcpsqc.ca/imaging).



<sup>1</sup>BC Guidelines. Appropriate Imaging for Common Situations in Primary and Emergency Care. 2020. Diagnostic Imaging. Available from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/practitioner-professional-resources/bc-guidelines/diagnostics-imaging>

<sup>2</sup>Choosing Wisely Canada. Orthopedics. Ten things physicians and patients should question. [Internet pamphlet]. Toronto Canada; 2017. [cited 2020 March 10]. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2RNwDTo>