



**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 Care Providers to support and guide conversations with patients, based on the *BC Guidelines for Appropriate Imaging*.<sup>1</sup>

The diagnosis of knee osteoarthritis (OA) can be made based on the patient’s history, physical examination, plain radiography consisting of weight-bearing posterior-anterior and lateral and skyline views.

The diagnosis of hip OA can be made based on the patient’s history, physical examination and plain radiography.<sup>2</sup>

Unless red flags are present, patients with knee and hip pain from moderate to severe OA who have imaging fair no better than those who don’t, and results do not affect management or the rate of recovery.<sup>2</sup> However, patients who are not aware of the risks and recommendations may request imaging. Here are some messages to inform and guide your conversations with patients requesting imaging for hip and knee pain.<sup>1</sup>



## Provide Information<sup>2</sup>

If imaging is not indicated, inform patients that:

- The research shows that if patients have significant osteoarthritis, there is no benefit to having an MRI.
- Most knee and hip pain problems can be diagnosed by better understanding the symptoms, the location of the pain and what makes the pain better or worse, without an MRI.
- Having an x-ray can inform the appropriate investigation pathway.
- Some orthopaedic surgeons do not require an MRI prior to consultation. If an MRI is required, the surgeon can request it.
- There are options for treatment and pain management.
- Patients can learn more about essential imaging tests through the *Conversation Guide for Patients – Hip and Knee Pain*.



## Know the Red Flags of Joint Pain Indications for Knee or Hip MRI:<sup>1</sup>

- Age < 40 years with knee or hip OA in subject joint
- Query tumour/neoplasm
- Query infection
- Fixed locked knee (not intermittent)
- Previous knee or hip surgery
- Osteonecrosis
- MRI was recommended on a previous imaging report

## Start the Conversation!

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/2RNwDT0>