



### What is magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)?

MRIs use magnets and radio waves instead of x-rays to create detailed pictures of soft tissues in the body like the brain and spinal cord. Radiation is not used in MRIs.

### Why are MRI's used for back pain?

MRI images show the spine in very clear detail. These pictures help doctors diagnose the cause of your back pain so they can decide how to treat it.

### What are the different kinds of MRIs for back pain and how are they taken?

- Conventional MRIs are taken with patients lying down on their backs.
- Positional or upright MRIs take multiple images in standing or sitting positions.

### Why was the positional MRI created?

The theory behind positional MRI is that abnormalities that don't show up in a conventional MRI might be more noticeable with the patient in weight bearing positions or positions that cause the pain. The thought is this might lead to a more accurate diagnosis and better treatment decisions.

### How effective is positional MRI?

It is uncertain whether positional MRI is as good as or better than conventional MRI for diagnosing back pain and making treatment decisions.

Studies comparing the two types of MRI are necessary to determine the benefit and value of additional imaging positions, but there are none at this time. There are no published scientific studies that show which patients are most likely to benefit from positional MRI, how results from positional MRI images can be used to make treatment decisions, or whether treatment decisions based on positional MRI results lead to better health, like decreased pain.

### Is positional MRI covered by Regence?

No. Positional MRI has not been proven to be effective, so it is considered "investigational" and is not covered. You can find more information in the Regence Medical Policy on Positional MRI at:

<http://blue.regence.com/trgmedpol/radiology/rad49.html>.

### How does positional MRI compare in cost to conventional MRI?

With a conventional MRI you are charged for one image. With a positional MRI you may be charged for multiple images, depending on the number of positions imaged, usually two to four.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

There is no evidence at this time that positional MRI is better than conventional MRI and it may be more expensive.

*Note: Regence physicians, nurses and pharmacists developed this summary to provide you with information about potential advantages and lack of advantages of positional MRI. This summary was developed based upon an evaluation of information from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), scientific studies and input from practicing doctors and specialists.*