

MRI is the single most important investigation your Spine surgeon needs to diagnose your problem and devise treatment plan. Referrals made to a Spine specialist are usually made after getting a MRI. It is important to know that most of the health insurance companies will allow only one MRI of a particular region to be done in one year. So, it's very crucial to get the best quality MRI. Following are the 6 things you should consider before deciding a place for getting your MRI

1. The quality of an MRI depends on the strength of the magnet used – it is measured in Tesla. For e.g. It can be compared to megapixels of a camera more the mega pixel better the quality of picture obtained. Usually, any MRI of less than 1.5 Tesla does not give optimal image quality (best image is with 3 tesla). Please avoid doing MRI at places where the magnet strength is less than 1 tesla.
2. Please avoid open MRI – it has a very low resolution and renders the exercise practically useless as the information it provides is very minimal to plan any further treatment. It should be done only in cases with severe fear of closed spaces (claustrophobia) as a last resort. Obese people might find it difficult to fit in the routine closed MRI, but they should still prefer a wide bore closed MRI instead of the open MRI.
3. The quality of information obtained from MRI also depends on the skill of the technician and the protocol they follow. The MRI cuts must be appropriately oriented to patient's anatomy to get the best information. There is lot of variations in skill and meticulousness of a technician. Various centers also follow different protocols for imaging. And there is always a chance of you getting an MRI in a certain series other than what your spine surgeon might have wanted and preferred. So, it is advisable to contact your spine specialist office to know any set protocol, preferences or requirements they have.
4. If you have history of spine surgery with hardware implantation, then it is important to get MRI done at a center with modern software installed to reduce the artifacts created by the metallic hardware. In these cases, MRI machine with 1.5 tesla is the best. You can talk to the MRI center and confirm that they have appropriate technical expertise and equipment to reduce artifacts from the metallic implants.
5. Please avoid getting your MRI in a machine which is placed in a truck as a part of temporary arrangement. The motion generated creates artifacts and impairs the quality of information and images obtained.
6. The Surgeon will need the images on a disc to review with you during consultation. So, make sure you get the CD containing the MRI images and you carry that CD for your office visit.