



Knee MRI Test DO I NEED IT?

KAISER PERMANENTE

What can cause knee pain?

Knee pain and injuries are very common. You may be asked about what might have caused the pain or how an injury happened. By using information from the history you provide as well as carefully examining your knee, your doctor will usually be able to figure out the reason for your pain. Fortunately, most knee pain and knee injuries get better with a combination of rest, gentle exercises, medications, and time.

But sometimes the cause of the pain is not clear. Sometimes because of the type of injury or the results of your knee exam, your doctor may recommend getting a Magnetic Resonance Image (MRI) of your knee. This test uses a magnetic field and radio waves to make an image of the parts of your knee. MRIs can be especially helpful when an orthopedic surgeon (a doctor that specializes in bones and joints) is considering recommending an operation. However, an MRI can't always pinpoint the real cause of knee pain. For example, more than half of patients may have a cartilage tear or other damage on the MRI, but have no knee pain. Even when some damage is seen on an MRI, it may not be the cause of the knee pain. So even if you have an MRI it may not change your treatment.

When can a knee MRI be helpful?

- When the cause of the knee pain is not clear
- When the injury, exam, or ongoing symptoms point to a diagnosis where a knee MRI may be helpful for planning a surgical procedure.

Your doctor needs to look at the whole picture with you. Your doctor may consult with another specialist to see if an MRI or surgery is likely to be helpful. Then he or she will talk with you about the best treatment options. Meanwhile, remember that most knee pain improves with time and treatment and does not need surgery.

How can I learn more about knee pain?

- **Log on:** Go to the Health Encyclopedia link on your physician's Home Page at kp.org/mydoctor or at kp.org/health. Search for "knee" or "knee MRI" in the Health Encyclopedia.
- **Look in:** *The Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook.*
- **Call or stop by:** Your local Health Education Center or Department.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

© 2007, The Permanente Medical Group, Inc. All rights reserved. Regional Health Education.
1036-E (Revised 5-07)