

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Knee Trouble; Hold the MRI!

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Knee trouble is one of the most common problems I see in the office. Family physicians see a lot of people in their offices with knee problems, too. It seems like I see more than I used to in patients of all age groups.

Why this is I'm not sure, but the origin of the problem is not what I wanted to tell you about.

It is important to tell you how a person with a knee problem is evaluated from an x-ray standpoint.

You already know that in examining any Orthopaedic problem, careful history and physical exam are the most important steps. While I usually do x-rays when dealing with knee problems, I am talking about plain, ordinary x-rays that have been around for decades.

These are the most important things to do after taking the history and doing the exam. Plain x-rays please. Not MRI! Hold the MRI!

Why do I say this? Am I old fashioned? Don't like new technology? No, it's just the correct way to do things.

Most patients and sometimes non Orthopaedic doctors think the MRI has replaced plain x-rays, because on MRI you "can see a lot more".

But you don't always have to see a lot more. Plain x-rays alone often give the answer and an MRI adds nothing to the evaluation. You would not believe how many patients I see who have had an MRI first and never have had a plain x-ray of the knee in this case.

MRI does however add a huge cost to the overall evaluation, at least 10 - 15 times as much as plain x-rays! The MRI is also uncomfortable and difficult for patients who are having pain.

MRI is wonderful and has a proper place in diagnosis. However, it has become so well known and appealing as a major new technology that our patients often think they didn't get good care if an MRI isn't done. I guess in this small way I am trying to help patients understand that you can have good care without an MRI. It is up to us as doctors not to over use tests just because they are popular and our patients want the newest technology.

I don't mind at all when patients come to my office and have had no x-rays of any kind. That gives me the most freedom in choosing what that particular person needs.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

For much more musculoskeletal and Orthopaedic Surgery information check out the office website www.orthopodsurgeon.com which also takes you to Your Orthopaedic Connection. It contains a huge amount of useful information.

In addition the website has the archive of every article I have written for you in Shepherd Argus. All the articles are listed from most recent back to the first one! Check it out for interesting articles you may have missed. I appreciate you loyal readers and welcome all newcomers!

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush