

### Information for Patients

Imaging means carrying out x-rays or scans. Imaging of the lower back to investigate the cause of back pain rarely helps decide how your pain is treated. Imaging should therefore only be performed after careful assessment from a clinician when they suspect a serious underlying cause of the back pain.

### About the condition

Lower back pain is a very common condition and it can affect a person's quality of life. However, it is rarely caused by serious disease and will often improve over time or with some changes to lifestyle. A doctor, or other clinician, should carry out an assessment to check there are no signs of serious causes for your lower back pain that may need further investigation.

### What are the **BENEFITS** of the imaging?

Most people do not need imaging for their lower back pain. However, a small number of people may have other symptoms alongside the lower back pain that may suggest a serious underlying cause for their pain. Imaging may then be needed.

### What are the **RISKS**?

Imaging may reveal minor changes that are common in lots of people and are not causing the lower back pain. Being told there are minor changes may cause unnecessary concern for people and may mean further investigations are carried out that do not provide any benefits for them. Also, some imaging exposes people to potentially harmful radiation.

### What are the **ALTERNATIVES**?

Continuing with day-to-day activities as much as possible can benefit many people. For some people, losing weight, physical exercise, physiotherapy and/or pain killers may also help. You can discuss alternatives, and what is best for you, with your doctor.

### What if you do **NOTHING**?

Most back pain often settles by itself. However, for many people, periods of back pain may come and go throughout their life.

For more information on back pain see [Back pain - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

You can find out more about the [Evidence Based Interventions](#) programme online