

Low back pain outcomes not improved by early imaging

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For workers with low back pain, early magnetic resonance imaging is not associated with better health outcomes at one year, according to a study published in the Aug. 15 issue of *Spine*.

(HealthDay) -- For workers with low back pain, early magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is not associated with better health outcomes at one year, according to a study published in the Aug. 15 issue of *Spine*.

Janessa M. Graves, M.P.H., Ph.D., of the University of Washington in Seattle, and colleagues conducted a nonrandomized, prospective, cohort study involving 1,226 Washington State workers' compensation claimants to examine the association between early MRI (within six weeks of injury) and health outcomes at one year after acute low back injury.

The researchers found that 18.6 percent of participants received early

MRI. The majority of participants had mild/minor sprains (77.9 percent) and radiculopathy (22.1 percent). Early imaging was not associated with substantial differences in the one-year health outcomes for sprains or radiculopathy, after adjustment for covariates. Early imaging was associated with a two-fold increase in the likelihood of [work disability](#) benefits at one year for those with a mild/major sprain (adjusted relative risk, 2.03), but not with increased risk of long-term disability for those with radiculopathy. For both groups, early imaging correlated with significantly longer duration of disability.

"The relationship between early lumbar imaging, health care utilization, time away from work, and health outcomes warrants further investigation to determine possible mechanisms of treatment and recovery," the authors write.

One or more of the authors disclosed [financial ties](#) to a commercial party related directly or indirectly to the subject of the study.

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