

Understandably, patients want to know what is wrong with them when they have back and neck pain. They assume that modern medical science will have the answers that they seek. When one doctor doesn't provide them with a conclusive answer, they often look for another who will.

What often happens is that one of their doctors will order some type of imaging test, like an MRI. The doctor will then point to some abnormality shown on the test and tell the patient that the abnormality is the cause of their pain. Although still in pain, the patient is comforted to know that someone has finally found the cause.

Patients often trust the doctor who "found the problem" to be the most qualified person to help them. The fact is that a doctor who is most confident about the cause of a spinal problem, is probably the least qualified to help! Why? Because it is almost impossible to know for sure if an abnormality on an MRI, CT scan or x-ray is producing pain.

A recent study published this year in one of the most respected medical journals points out that what doctors think about MRI results, is often wrong. They noted that while disc degeneration, disc tears and pinched nerves may be able to be seen on an MRI, none of these necessarily cause pain. The authors of the study went so far as to say: "If your doctor tells you he or she can identify the cause of your low back pain on an MRI scan or x-ray, don't believe it."

So what should you do now that you know this? First, don't be too concerned about knowing the cause. The most important thing is that you get better. Try safe, low cost, conservative treatment options first, like chiropractic. Often you will pay less for a trial of conservative care than you would for an MRI which, according to this study, doesn't give you any conclusive information. Conservative care is usually successful, but if it isn't, then you can move to other, more invasive types of care.