



Evolut Clinical Guideline 2036 for Lumbar Spine Computed Tomography (CT)

Guideline Number: Evolut_CG_2036	<u>Applicable Codes</u>	
<i>"Evolut" refers to Evolut Health LLC and Evolut Specialty Services, Inc. © 1997 - 2026 Evolut. All rights Reserved.</i>		
Original Date: September 1997	Last Revised Date: June 2025	Implementation Date: January 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT	3
GENERAL INFORMATION	3
PURPOSE	3
SPECIAL NOTE	3
INDICATIONS FOR LUMBAR SPINE CT	3
EVALUATION OF NEUROLOGIC DEFICITS	3
EVALUATION OF BACK PAIN	4
EVALUATION OF TRAUMA OR ACUTE INJURY	5
PARS DEFECT (SPONDYLOLYSIS) OR SPONDYLOLISTHESIS	5
EVALUATION OF COMPRESSION FRACTURES	5
CT MYELOGRAM	6
EVALUATION OF TUMOR, CANCER, OR METASTASIS	6
EVALUATION OF KNOWN OR SUSPECTED INFECTION	6
EVALUATION OF KNOWN OR SUSPECTED INFLAMMATORY DISEASE	6
EVALUATION OF SPINE ABNORMALITIES RELATED TO IMMUNE SYSTEM SUPPRESSION	7
OTHER INDICATIONS	7
PREOPERATIVE OR POSTOPERATIVE ASSESSMENT	7
FURTHER EVALUATION OF INDETERMINATE FINDINGS	8
OTHER COMBINATION STUDIES WITH LUMBAR SPINE CT	8
LUMBAR SPINE MRI AND LUMBAR SPINE CT	9
BRAIN/CERVICAL SPINE/THORACIC SPINE/LUMBAR SPINE CT	9
CERVICAL SPINE/THORACIC SPINE/LUMBAR SPINE CT	9
COMBINATION STUDIES FOR MALIGNANCY FOR INITIAL STAGING OR RESTAGING	10
CODING AND STANDARDS	11
CODES	11
APPLICABLE LINES OF BUSINESS	11
BACKGROUND	11
*CONSERVATIVE TREATMENT	11
**HOME EXERCISE PROGRAM	11

GAIT AND SPINE IMAGING.....	12
<i>Table 1</i>	12
CT MYELOGRAM	12
CAUDA EQUINA SYNDROME	13
CONTRAINDICATIONS AND PREFERRED STUDIES	13
SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE	13
ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE.....	15
POLICY HISTORY	16
LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE	17
GUIDELINE APPROVAL	17
<i>Committee</i>	17
DISCLAIMER	17
REFERENCES.....	18

STATEMENT

General Information

- *It is an expectation that all patients receive care/services from a licensed clinician. All appropriate supporting documentation, including recent pertinent office visit notes, laboratory data, and results of any special testing must be provided. If applicable: All prior relevant imaging results and the reason that alternative imaging cannot be performed must be included in the documentation submitted.*
- *Where a specific clinical indication is not directly addressed in this guideline, medical necessity determination will be made based on widely accepted standard of care criteria. These criteria are supported by evidence-based or peer-reviewed sources such as medical literature, societal guidelines and state/national recommendations.*
- *The guideline criteria in the following sections were developed utilizing evidence-based and peer-reviewed resources from medical publications and societal organization guidelines as well as from widely accepted standard of care, best practice recommendations.*

Purpose

Computed tomography is used for the evaluation, assessment of severity, and follow-up of diseases of the spine. CT is often used to study the lumbar spine for conditions such as degenerative disc disease when MRI is contraindicated. CT provides excellent depiction of bone detail and is used in the evaluation of known fractures of the lumbar spine and for evaluation of postoperative patients.

Special Note

If there is a combination request* for an overlapping body part, either requested at the same time or sequentially (within the past 3 months) one of the following must be demonstrated:

- The results of the prior study should be inconclusive or show a need for additional or follow up imaging evaluation
- The office notes should clearly document an indication why overlapping imaging is needed and how it will change management for the patient.

(*Unless approvable in the **combination section** as noted in the guidelines)

INDICATIONS FOR LUMBAR SPINE CT

Evaluation of Neurologic Deficits ⁽¹⁾

When Lumbar Spine MRI is Contraindicated or Cannot be performed

- With any of the following new neurological deficits documented on physical exam that localizes to the lumbar spine

- Extremity muscular weakness (not likely caused by plexopathy, peripheral neuropathy or neuromuscular disease)
- Pathologic abnormal reflexes (not likely caused by plexopathy, peripheral neuropathy, or neuromuscular disease)
- Absent/decreased sensation along a particular lumbar dermatome (nerve distribution): pin prick, touch, vibration, proprioception, or temperature (and not likely caused by plexopathy, or peripheral neuropathy)
- Lower extremity decreased muscle tone (not likely caused by plexopathy, peripheral neuropathy or neuromuscular disease)
- New onset bowel or bladder dysfunction (e.g., retention or incontinence)—not related to an inherent bowel or bladder process
- Gait abnormalities (see **Table 1** below for more details)
- New onset foot drop (not related to a peripheral nerve injury, e.g., peroneal nerve)
- Cauda Equina Syndrome as evidence by severe back pain/sciatica along with one of the defined symptoms (see **Cauda Equina Syndrome** section)

Evaluation of Back Pain ⁽¹⁾

With any of the following when Lumbar Spine MRI is Contraindicated

- With new or worsening objective **neurologic deficits** on exam, as above
- Failure of **conservative treatment*** for a minimum of six (6) weeks within the last six (6) months:

NOTE - Failure of conservative treatment is defined as one of the following:

- Lack of meaningful improvement after a full course of treatment; **OR**
- Progression or worsening of symptoms during treatment; **OR**
- Documentation of a medical reason the member is unable to participate in treatment

Closure of medical or therapy offices, patient inconvenience, or noncompliance without explanation does not constitute “inability to complete” treatment.

- With progression or worsening of symptoms during the course of **conservative treatment***
- With an abnormal electromyography (EMG) or nerve conduction study (if performed) indicating a lumbar radiculopathy. ^(2,3)
- Isolated back pain in pediatric population when at least ONE of the following red flags are present ^(4,5) (Note: conservative care not required if red flags are present).
 - Age 5 or younger
 - Constant pain
 - Pain lasting > 4 weeks
 - Abnormal neurologic examination

- Early morning stiffness and/or gelling
- Night pain that prevents or disrupts sleep
- Radicular pain
- Fever, weight loss, or malaise
- Postural changes (e.g., kyphosis or scoliosis)
- Limp (or refusal to walk in a younger child)

Evaluation of Trauma or Acute Injury ⁽⁶⁾

- Presents with any of the following **neurological deficits** as above
- With progression or worsening of symptoms during the course of **conservative treatment**
- History of underlying spinal abnormalities (i.e., ankylosing spondylitis or diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis) (Both MRI and CT are approvable) ⁽⁷⁾
- When the patient is clinically unevaluable or there are preliminary imaging findings (x-ray or MRI) needing further evaluation

Pars Defect (Spondylolysis) or Spondylolisthesis

- Pars defect (spondylolysis) or spondylolisthesis in adults when Flexion/Extension x-rays show instability ⁽⁸⁾
- Clinically suspected pars defect (spondylolysis) after plain films (flexion extension instability not required) in pediatric population (< 18 yr.), or athletes and imaging would change treatment ⁽⁴⁾ when MRI is contraindicated/cannot be performed or surgeon preference

Evaluation of Compression Fractures ⁽⁹⁾

- To assess union of a fracture when physical examination, plain radiographs, or prior imaging suggest delayed or non-healing
- To determine the position of fracture fragments
- With history of malignancy
- Fracture on initial imaging in a young patient (<50) with no history of trauma and concern for pathologic fracture
- Fracture with imaging characteristics concerning for underlying malignancy
- With an associated new focal **neurologic deficit** as above
- Prior to a planned surgery/intervention or if the results of the CT will change management

CT Myelogram (10,11)

When MRI cannot be Performed/Contraindicated/Surgeon Preference

- When signs and symptoms are inconsistent or not explained by the MRI findings
- Demonstration of the site of a CSF leak (known or suspected spontaneous (idiopathic) intracranial hypotension (SIH), post lumbar puncture headache, post spinal surgery headache, orthostatic headache, rhinorrhea or otorrhea, or cerebrospinal-venous fistula)
- Surgical planning, especially regarding the nerve roots or evaluation of dural sac

Evaluation of Tumor, Cancer, or Metastasis

With any of the Following:

- **Primary tumor** (12)
 - Initial staging primary spinal tumor
 - Follow-up of known primary cancer of patient undergoing active treatment within the past year or as per surveillance imaging guidance for that cancer
 - Known spinal tumor with new signs or symptoms (e.g., new or increasing nontraumatic pain, physical, laboratory, and/or imaging findings)
 - With an associated new focal **neurologic deficit** as above
- **Metastatic tumor** (13)
 - With evidence of metastasis on bone scan needing further clarification **OR** inconclusive findings on a prior imaging exam
 - With an associated new focal **neurologic deficit**
 - Known malignancy with new signs or symptoms (e.g., new or increasing nontraumatic pain, radiculopathy or back pain that occurs at night and wakes the patient from sleep with known active cancer, physical, laboratory, and/or imaging findings) in a tumor that tends to metastasize to the spine (14)

Evaluation of Known or Suspected Infection (15)

When Lumbar Spine MRI is contraindicated

E.g. Osteomyelitis or abscess

- As evidenced by signs and/or symptoms, laboratory (i.e., abnormal white blood cell count, ESR and/or CRP) or prior imaging findings
- Follow-up imaging of infection
 - With worsening symptoms/laboratory values (i.e., white blood cell count, ESR/CRP) or x-ray findings

Evaluation of Known or Suspected Inflammatory Disease

- Spondyloarthropathies, known or suspected

- Ankylosing Spondylitis/Spondyloarthropathies with non-diagnostic or indeterminate x-ray and appropriate rheumatology workup
- Known and suspected neuroinflammatory conditions (such as sarcoidosis, Bechet's)
 - Initial evaluation of suspected neuroinflammatory conditions after initial workup and detailed neurological examination
 - Follow-up of known neuroinflammatory conditions when there are either:
 - New or worsening signs or symptoms OR
 - To evaluate treatment response

Evaluation of Spine Abnormalities Related to Immune System Suppression ⁽¹⁵⁾

When Lumbar Spine MRI is Contraindicated or Cannot be performed

E.g., HIV, chemotherapy, leukemia, or lymphoma

- As evidenced by signs/symptoms, laboratory, or prior imaging findings

Other Indications

When MRI is Contraindicated or Cannot be Performed

Note: See combination requests, below, for initial advanced imaging assessment and pre-operatively

- Tethered cord or spinal dysraphism (known or suspected), based on preliminary imaging, neurological exam, and/or high-risk cutaneous stigmata ^(16,17)
- Known anorectal malformations ⁽¹⁸⁾
- Suspicious sacral dimple (those that are deep, larger than 0.5 cm, located within the superior portion of the gluteal crease or above the gluteal crease, multiple dimples, or associated with other cutaneous markers) or duplicated or deviated gluteal cleft ⁽¹⁹⁾
 - Patients ≤ 3 months should have ultrasound
- Toe walking in a child when associated with upper motor neuron signs, including hyperreflexia, spasticity; or orthopedic deformity with concern for tethered cord (e.g., pes cavus, clawed toes, leg, or foot length deformity (excluding tight heel cords)) ⁽²⁰⁾
- Known Chiari II (Arnold-Chiari syndrome), III, or IV malformation ⁽¹⁷⁾
- For follow-up/repeat evaluation of Arnold-Chiari I with new signs or symptoms suggesting recurrent spinal cord tethering (For initial diagnosis see Combinations section below)

PREOPERATIVE OR POSTOPERATIVE ASSESSMENT

When not otherwise specified in the guideline:

Preoperative evaluation:

- CT discogram
- Imaging of the area requested is needed to develop a surgical plan (no contraindication to MRI required if ordered by a neurosurgeon or orthopedic surgeon)

Postoperative Evaluation:

- Evaluation of post operative pseudarthrosis, hardware complication and/or extent of fusion after initial x-rays (a contraindication to MRI is not needed)

NOTE: For this indication, advanced imaging should not occur until > 6 months after surgery

- Surgical infection as evidenced by signs/symptoms, laboratory, or prior imaging findings when MRI is contraindicated or cannot be performed
- New or changing neurological deficits or symptoms post-operatively ⁽²¹⁾ (see **neurological deficit** section above) when MRI is contraindicated or cannot be performed
- Known or suspected complications
- A clinical reason is provided how imaging may change management

NOTE: This section applies only within the first few months following surgery unless otherwise specified

FURTHER EVALUATION OF INDETERMINATE FINDINGS

Unless follow-up is otherwise specified within the guideline

- For initial evaluation of an inconclusive finding on a prior imaging report that requires further clarification. When MRI cannot be performed, is contraindicated, or CT is preferred to characterize the finding.
- One follow-up exam of a prior indeterminate MRI/CT finding to ensure no suspicious interval change has occurred. (No further surveillance unless specified as highly suspicious or change was found on last follow-up exam). (When MRI cannot be performed, is contraindicated, or CT is preferred to characterize the finding).

OTHER COMBINATION STUDIES WITH LUMBAR SPINE CT

NOTE: When medical necessity is met for an individual study **AND** conscious sedation is required (such as for young pediatric patients or patients with significant developmental delay), the entire combination is indicated

Lumbar Spine MRI and Lumbar Spine CT

- Pathologic or complex fractures
- Malignant process of spine with both bony and soft tissue involvement
- Clearly documented indication for bony and soft tissue abnormality where assessment will change management for the patient

Brain/Cervical Spine/Thoracic Spine/Lumbar Spine CT

When MRI is contraindicated or cannot be performed or surgeon preference:

- For initial evaluation of a suspected Arnold Chiari malformation
- Follow-up imaging of a known type II or type III Arnold Chiari malformation. For Arnold Chiari type I, follow-up imaging only if new or changing signs/symptoms ^(17,22–24)
- Oncological Applications (e.g., primary nervous system, metastatic) ⁽¹²⁾
 - Drop metastasis from brain or spine (CT spine imaging in this scenario is usually CT myelogram) see **Background**
 - Suspected leptomeningeal carcinomatosis ⁽²⁵⁾
 - Known tumor evaluation and monitoring in neurocutaneous syndromes
- CSF leak highly suspected and supported by patient history and/or physical exam findings (e.g., known or suspected spontaneous intracranial hypotension (SIH), post lumbar puncture headache, post spinal surgery headache, orthostatic headache, rhinorrhea or otorrhea, or cerebrospinal-venous fistula) ⁽¹⁰⁾

Cervical Spine/Thoracic Spine/Lumbar Spine CT

When MRI is contraindicated or cannot be performed or surgeon preference:

- Survey/complete initial assessment of infant/child with congenital scoliosis or juvenile idiopathic scoliosis under the age of 10 ^(26,27) (e.g., congenital scoliosis, idiopathic scoliosis, scoliosis with vertebral anomalies)
- In the presence of neurological deficit, progressive spinal deformity, or for preoperative planning ^(28,29)
- Back pain with known vertebral anomalies (hemivertebrae, hypoplasia, agenesis, butterfly, segmentation defect, bars, or congenital wedging) in a child on preliminary imaging
- Scoliosis with any of the following ^(29,30):
 - Progressive spinal deformity
 - Neurologic deficit (new or unexplained)
 - Early onset
 - Atypical curve (e.g., short segment, >30° kyphosis, left thoracic curve, associated organ anomalies)

- Pre-operative planning
- When office notes clearly document how imaging will change management
- Arnold-Chiari malformations ^(17,31)
 - Arnold-Chiari I
 - For evaluation of spinal abnormalities associated with initial diagnosis of Arnold-Chiari Malformation. (C/T/L spine due to association with tethered cord and syringomyelia), and initial imaging has not been completed ^(32,33)
 - Arnold-Chiari II-IV - For initial evaluation and follow-up as appropriate
 - Usually associated with open and closed spinal dysraphism, particularly meningocele ⁽³³⁾
- Tethered cord, or spinal dysraphism (known or suspected) based on preliminary imaging, neurological exam, and/or high-risk cutaneous stigmata, ^(16,17,33) when anesthesia required for imaging ⁽³⁴⁾ (e.g., meningocele, lipomenocele, diastematomyelia, fatty/thickened filum terminale, and other spinal cord malformations)
- Oncological Applications (e.g., primary nervous system, metastatic) ⁽¹²⁾
 - Drop metastasis from brain or spine (imaging also includes brain; CT spine imaging in this scenario is usually CT myelogram)
 - Suspected leptomeningeal carcinomatosis (LC) ⁽³⁵⁾
 - Any combination of these for spinal survey in patient with metastases
 - Known tumor evaluation and monitoring in neurocutaneous syndromes
- CSF leak highly suspected and supported by patient history and/or physical exam findings (e.g., known or suspected spontaneous intracranial hypotension (SIH), post lumbar puncture headache, post spinal surgery headache, orthostatic headache, rhinorrhea or otorrhea, or cerebrospinal-venous fistula) ⁽¹⁰⁾
- CT myelogram when meets above guidelines and MRI is contraindicated or for surgical planning
- Post-procedure (discogram) CT

Combination Studies for Malignancy for Initial Staging or Restaging

Unless otherwise specified in this guideline, indication for combination studies for malignancy for initial staging or restaging:

- Concurrent studies to include CT or MRI of any of the following areas as appropriate depending on the cancer: Abdomen, Brain, Chest, Neck, Pelvis, Cervical Spine, Thoracic Spine or Lumbar Spine.

CODING AND STANDARDS

Codes

72131, 72132, 72133, +0722T

Applicable Lines of Business

☒	CHIP (Children’s Health Insurance Program)
☒	Commercial
☒	Exchange/Marketplace
☒	Medicaid
☒	Medicare Advantage

BACKGROUND

*Conservative Treatment

Non-operative conservative treatment should include a multimodality approach consisting of at least one (1) active and one (1) inactive component targeting the affected region.

- **Active Modalities**
 - Physical therapy
 - Physician-supervised home exercise program**
 - Chiropractic care
- **Inactive Modalities**
 - Medications (e.g., NSAIDs, steroids, analgesics)
 - Injections (e.g., epidural injection, selective nerve root block)
 - Medical Devices (e.g., TENS unit, bracing)

**Home Exercise Program

The following elements are required to meet for conservative therapy guidelines for HEP ⁽¹⁾:

- Documentation of an exercise prescription/plan provided by a physician, physical therapist, or chiropractor; **AND**
- Follow-up documentation regarding completion of HEP after the required 6-week timeframe or inability to complete HEP due to a documented medical reason (e.g., increased pain or inability to physically perform exercises).

Gait and Spine Imaging

Table 1 (36–39)

Gait	Characteristic	Work up/Imaging
Hemiparetic	Spastic unilateral, circumduction	Brain and/or, Cervical spine imaging based on associated symptoms
Diplegic	Spastic bilateral, circumduction	Brain, Cervical and Thoracic Spine imaging
Myelopathic	Wide based, stiff, unsteady	Cervical and/or Thoracic spine MRI based on associated symptoms
Cerebellar Ataxic	Broad based, clumsy, staggering, lack of coordination, usually also with limb ataxia	Brain imaging
Apraxic	Magnetic, shuffling, difficulty initiating	Brain imaging
Parkinsonian	Stooped, small steps, rigid, turning en bloc, decreased arm swing	Brain Imaging
Choreiform	Irregular, jerky, involuntary movements	Medication review, consider brain imaging as per movement disorder Brain MR guidelines
Sensory ataxic	Cautious, stomping, worsening without visual input (ie + Romberg)	EMG, blood work, consider spinal (cervical or thoracic cord imaging) imaging based on EMG
Neuropathic	Steppage, dragging of toes	EMG initial testing; BUT if there is a foot drop, lumbar spine MRI is appropriate without EMG Pelvis MR if there is evidence of plexopathy
Vestibular	Insecure, veer to one side, worse when eyes closed, vertigo	Consider Brain/IAC MRI

CT Myelogram

Myelography is the instillation of intrathecal contrast media under fluoroscopy. Patients are then imaged with CT to evaluate for spinal canal pathology. Although this technique has diminished greatly due to the advent of MRI due to its non-invasiveness and superior soft-tissue contrast, myelography is still a useful technique for conventional indications, such as spinal stenosis,

when MRI is contraindicated, nondiagnostic, or surgeon preference (see guidelines above), brachial plexus injury in neonates, radiation therapy treatment planning, and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leak.

Cauda Equina Syndrome

- Symptoms include severe back pain or sciatica along with one or more of the following:
 - Saddle anesthesia — loss of sensation restricted to the area of the buttocks, perineum and inner surfaces of the thighs (areas that would sit on a saddle).
 - Recent bladder/bowel dysfunction
 - Achilles reflex absent on both sides
 - Sexual dysfunction that can come on suddenly
 - Absent anal reflex and bulbocavernosus reflex
- This is a “Red Flag” situation and Lumbar Spine MRI is approvable.

Contraindications and Preferred Studies

- Contraindications and reasons why a CT/CTA cannot be performed may include: impaired renal function, significant allergy to IV contrast, pregnancy (depending on trimester)
- Contraindications and reasons why an MRI/MRA cannot be performed may include: impaired renal function, claustrophobia, non-MRI compatible devices (such as non-compatible defibrillator or pacemaker), metallic fragments in a high-risk location, patient exceeds weight limit/dimensions of MRI machine

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Low Back Pain: 2021 Update ⁽¹⁾

Study Design: The study is an update of the ACR Appropriateness Criteria for low back pain, developed by the Expert Panel on Neurological Imaging. The criteria are evidence-based guidelines for specific clinical conditions, reviewed annually by a multidisciplinary expert panel. The guideline development and revision include an extensive analysis of current medical literature from peer-reviewed journals and the application of well-established methodologies (RAND/UCLA Appropriateness Method and Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation or GRADE) to rate the appropriateness of imaging and treatment procedures for specific clinical scenarios.

Target Population: The target population includes patients in the United States with acute low back pain, with or without radiculopathy. Acute low back pain is the leading cause of years lived with disability and the third-ranking cause of disability-adjusted life-years in the United States. The criteria address various scenarios, including uncomplicated acute low back pain, subacute or chronic low back pain, low back pain with suspected cauda equina syndrome, low back pain with a history of prior lumbar surgery, and low back pain with one or more risk factors such as low-velocity trauma, osteoporosis, elderly individuals, or chronic steroid use.

Key Factors

Imaging Recommendations: The criteria provide detailed recommendations on the appropriateness of various imaging procedures for different clinical scenarios. For example, imaging is typically not warranted for acute uncomplicated low back pain, while MRI is recommended for patients with suspected cauda equina syndrome or those who are candidates for surgery or intervention with persistent or progressive symptoms.

Clinical Scenarios: The document outlines seven variants of low back pain and provides specific imaging recommendations for each variant. These include acute low back pain with or without radiculopathy, subacute or chronic low back pain, low back pain with suspected cauda equina syndrome, low back pain with a history of prior lumbar surgery, and low back pain with risk factors such as low-velocity trauma, osteoporosis, elderly individuals, or chronic steroid use.

Radiation Levels: The criteria also include relative radiation level designations for each imaging examination, providing information on potential adverse health effects associated with radiation exposure.

ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Acute Spinal Trauma ⁽⁶⁾

Study Design: The document is a revised guideline by the American College of Radiology (ACR) for the appropriateness of imaging procedures in acute spinal trauma. It includes a summary of literature reviews, expert panel recommendations, and evidence-based criteria for various clinical scenarios.

Target Population: The guidelines focus on patients aged 16 years and older who have experienced acute blunt trauma to the cervical, thoracic, or lumbar spine. Specific criteria are provided for different age groups and clinical conditions, including low-risk patients, those with suspected arterial injury, and obtunded patients.

Key Factors:

Imaging Procedures: The document outlines the appropriateness of various imaging modalities such as CT, MRI, MRA, and radiography for different clinical scenarios. It emphasizes the use of CT without IV contrast as the initial imaging modality for most cases.

Clinical Criteria: The guidelines incorporate the NEXUS and Canadian C-Spine Rule (CCR) criteria for determining the need for cervical spine imaging. These criteria are based on factors such as age, mechanism of injury, and clinical symptoms.

Radiation Levels: The document includes relative radiation level designations for each imaging procedure, highlighting the importance of minimizing radiation exposure.

Expert Panel: The guidelines were developed by an expert panel on neurological imaging, including specialists from various institutions and organizations.

ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Management of Vertebral Compression Fractures: 2022 Update ⁽⁹⁾

Study Design: The study design involves the development and revision of the ACR

Appropriateness Criteria, which are evidence-based guidelines for specific clinical conditions. These guidelines are reviewed annually by a multidisciplinary expert panel. The guideline development includes an extensive analysis of current medical literature from peer-reviewed journals and the application of well-established methodologies such as the RAND/UCLA Appropriateness Method and the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development, and Evaluation (GRADE) to rate the appropriateness of imaging and treatment procedures for specific clinical scenarios.

Target Population: The target population for this study includes individuals with vertebral compression fractures, which can be caused by various etiologies such as trauma, osteoporosis, or neoplastic infiltration. Osteoporosis-related fractures are the most common cause of VCFs and have a high prevalence among postmenopausal women and similarly aged men. The study also addresses VCFs caused by trauma and malignancies, including primary bone tumors and metastatic cancers.

Key factors:

- The prevalence and causes of VCFs, highlighting the high incidence among postmenopausal women and the increasing incidence in men.
- The importance of diagnostic imaging in characterizing VCFs and guiding treatment decisions.
- The use of various imaging modalities such as MRI, CT, FDG-PET/CT, and bone scans to evaluate VCFs.
- The management of both osteoporotic and pathologic VCFs, including medical management, percutaneous vertebral augmentation, and surgical consultation.
- The role of minimally invasive percutaneous image-guided techniques for treating spine tumors and the potential benefits of vertebral augmentation procedures.

ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE

Shared Findings

Imaging Recommendations: All three articles emphasize the importance of imaging in diagnosing and managing spinal conditions. They recommend using MRI and CT scans as primary imaging modalities due to their high sensitivity and specificity in detecting spinal injuries and abnormalities. For instance, "Hassankhani et al 2024 ACR Acute Spinal Trauma" highlights the use of CT and MRI for acute spinal trauma, while "Hutchins et al 2021 JACR Low Back Pain" and "Khan et al 2023 JACR Management of Vertebral Compression Fractures" also stress the importance of these imaging techniques for low back pain and vertebral compression fractures, respectively. ^(1,6,9)

Clinical Criteria and Guidelines: The articles provide evidence-based guidelines and criteria for managing spinal conditions. "Hassankhani et al 2024 ACR Acute Spinal Trauma" discusses the use of the National Emergency X-Radiography Utilization Study (NEXUS) and the Canadian C-Spine Rule (CCR) for cervical spine injuries. ⁽⁶⁾ Similarly, "Hutchins et al 2021 JACR Low Back Pain" outlines the American College of Radiology Appropriateness Criteria for low back pain management. ⁽¹⁾ "Khan et al 2023 JACR

Management of Vertebral Compression Fractures" provides guidelines for managing vertebral compression fractures, including the use of the Spinal Instability Neoplastic Score (SINS) for evaluating spinal stability. ⁽⁹⁾

Non-Surgical Management: All three articles emphasize the importance of non-surgical management as the first line of treatment. They recommend conservative therapies such as pain management, physical therapy, and bracing before considering surgical interventions. For example, "Hutchins et al 2021 JACR Low Back Pain" and "Khan et al 2023 JACR Management of Vertebral Compression Fractures" both highlight the role of conservative management in treating low back pain and vertebral compression fractures. ^(1,9)

POLICY HISTORY

Date	Summary
June 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guideline name changed from Lumbar Spine CT to Lumbar Computed Tomography (CT) ● Guideline number changed from Evolent CG 045 to Evolent CG 2036 ● Added new bullet-point to the General Statement section ● Checked the Medicare Advantage box in the Applicable Lines of Business table ● Added a Summary of Evidence and Analysis of Evidence ● Updated references and background ● Clarified neurological deficit ● Evaluation of Compression Fractures <p>Added</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fracture on initial imaging in a young patient (<50) with no history of trauma and concern for pathologic fracture ● Fracture with imaging characteristics concerning for underlying malignancy
June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aligned Combination Studies across guidelines ● Added Contraindications and Preferred Studies section ● Reduced background ● Updated References



LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE

Guideline Approval

Committee

Reviewed / Approved by Evolent Specialty Services Clinical Guideline Review Committee

Disclaimer

Evolent Clinical Guidelines do not constitute medical advice. Treating health care professionals are solely responsible for diagnosis, treatment, and medical advice. Evolent uses Clinical Guidelines in accordance with its contractual obligations to provide utilization management. Coverage for services varies for individual members according to the terms of their health care coverage or government program. Individual members' health care coverage may not utilize some Evolent Clinical Guidelines. Evolent clinical guidelines contain guidance that requires prior authorization and service limitations. A list of procedure codes, services or drugs may not be all inclusive and does not imply that a service or drug is a covered or non-covered service or drug. Evolent reserves the right to review and update this Clinical Guideline in its sole discretion. Notice of any changes shall be provided as required by applicable provider agreements and laws or regulations. Members should contact their Plan customer service representative for specific coverage information.

Evolent Clinical Guidelines are comprehensive and inclusive of various procedural applications for each service type. Our guidelines may be used to supplement Medicare criteria when such criteria is not fully established. When Medicare criteria is determined to not be fully established, we only reference the relevant portion of the corresponding Evolent Clinical Guideline that is applicable to the specific service or item requested in order to determine medical necessity.

REFERENCES

1. Hutchins TA, Peckham M, Shah LM, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Low Back Pain: 2021 Update. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*. 2021;18(11):S361-S379. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2021.08.002
2. Lefkowitz TR. Electrodiagnosis of Radiculopathies (Cervical, Thoracic, and Lumbar). *PM&R Knowledge NOW*. Published online June 22, 2023. <https://now.aapmr.org/electrodiagnosis-of-radiculopathies-cervical-thoracic-and-lumbar/>
3. Marquardt RJ, Levin KH. Electrodiagnostic Assessment of Radiculopathies. *Neurol Clin*. 2021;39(4):983-995. doi:10.1016/j.ncl.2021.06.011
4. American College of Radiology. *ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Back Pain-Child.*; 2024.
5. Frosch M, Mauritz MD, Bielack S, et al. Etiology, Risk Factors, and Diagnosis of Back Pain in Children and Adolescents: Evidence- and Consensus-Based Interdisciplinary Recommendations. *Children*. 2022;9(2):192. doi:10.3390/children9020192
6. American College of Radiology. *ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Acute Spinal Trauma.*; 2024.
7. Ren C, Zhu Q, Yuan H. Imaging features of spinal fractures in ankylosing spondylitis and the diagnostic value of different imaging methods. *Quant Imaging Med Surg*. 2021;11(6):2499-2508. doi:10.21037/qims-20-962
8. Mansfield JT, Wroten M. Pars Interarticularis Defect. *StatPearls*. Published online June 12, 2023. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK538292/>
9. Khan MA, Jennings JW, Baker JC, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Management of Vertebral Compression Fractures: 2022 Update. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*. 2023;20(5):S102-S124. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2023.02.015
10. Patel DM, Weinberg BD, Hoch MJ. CT Myelography: Clinical Indications and Imaging Findings. *RadioGraphics*. 2020;40(2):470-484. doi:10.1148/rg.2020190135
11. North American Spine Society. Diagnosis and Treatment of Lumbar Disc Herniation with Radiculopathy. *NASS*. Published online 2012. doi:<https://www.spine.org/Portals/0/Assets/Downloads/ResearchClinicalCare/Guidelines/LumbarDiscHerniation.pdf>
12. Referenced with permission from the National Comprehensive Cancer Network Clinical Practice Guidelines in Oncology (NCCN Guidelines®) for Central Nervous System Cancers Version 5.2024. © National Comprehensive Cancer Network, Inc. 2025. All rights reserved. To view the most recent and complete version of the guideline, go online to [NCCN.org](https://www.nccn.org).
13. Roberts CC, Daffner RH, Weissman BN, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® on Metastatic Bone Disease. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*. 2010;7(6):400-409. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2010.02.015
14. Ziu E, Viswanathan VK, Mesfin FB. Spinal Metastasis. *StatPearls*. Published online August 14, 2023. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK441950/>

15. Ortiz AO, Levitt A, Shah LM, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Suspected Spine Infection. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*. 2021;18(11):S488-S501. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2021.09.001
16. Trapp B, de Andrade Lourenção Freddi T, de Oliveira Morais Hans M, et al. A Practical Approach to Diagnosis of Spinal Dysraphism. *RadioGraphics*. 2021;41(2):559-575. doi:10.1148/rg.2021200103
17. Hidalgo JA, Tork CA, Varacallo MA. Arnold-Chiari Malformation. *StatPearls*. Published online September 4, 2023. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK431076/>
18. Stafrace S, Lobo L, Augdal TA, et al. Imaging of anorectal malformations: where are we now? Abdominal imaging task force of the European Society of Paediatric Radiology. *Pediatr Radiol*. 2022;52(9):1802-1809. doi:10.1007/s00247-022-05395-7
19. Choi SJ, Yoon HM, Hwang JS, et al. Incidence of Occult Spinal Dysraphism Among Infants With Cutaneous Stigmata and Proportion Managed With Neurosurgery. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2020;3(7):e207221. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.7221
20. Zileli M, Borkar SA, Sinha S, et al. Cervical Spondylotic Myelopathy: Natural Course and the Value of Diagnostic Techniques –WFNS Spine Committee Recommendations. *Neurospine*. 2019;16(3):386-402. doi:10.14245/ns.1938240.120
21. Corona-Cedillo R, Saavedra-Navarrete MT, Espinoza-Garcia JJ, Mendoza-Aguilar AN, Ternovoy SK, Roldan-Valadez E. Imaging Assessment of the Postoperative Spine: An Updated Pictorial Review of Selected Complications. *Biomed Res Int*. 2021;2021(1):9940001. doi:10.1155/2021/9940001
22. Hatgaonkar AM, Mahajan SM, Hatgoankar KA, Bandre GR. MRI Imaging Insights in Chiari Malformation Type 1 and Variations With Hydrosyringomyelia. *Cureus*. 2024;16(3):e55676. doi:10.7759/cureus.55676
23. Mohammad SA, Osman NM, Ahmed KA. The value of CSF flow studies in the management of CSF disorders in children: a pictorial review. *Insights Imaging*. 2019;10(1):3. doi:10.1186/s13244-019-0686-x
24. Radic JAE, Cochrane DD. Choosing Wisely Canada: Pediatric Neurosurgery Recommendations. *Paediatr Child Health*. 2018;23(6):383-387. doi:10.1093/pch/pxy012
25. Wang N, Bertalan MS, Brastianos PK. Leptomeningeal metastasis from systemic cancer: Review and update on management. *Cancer*. 2018;124(1):21-35. doi:10.1002/cncr.30911
26. Jones JY, Saigal G, Palasis S, et al. ACR Appropriateness Criteria® Scoliosis-Child. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*. 2019;16(5):S244-S251. doi:10.1016/j.jacr.2019.02.018
27. Strahle J, Smith BW, Martinez M, et al. The association between Chiari malformation Type I, spinal syrinx, and scoliosis. *J Neurosurg Pediatr*. 2015;15(6):607-611. doi:10.3171/2014.11.PEDS14135
28. Trenga AP, Singla A, Feger MA, Abel MF. Patterns of congenital bony spinal deformity and associated neural anomalies on X-ray and magnetic resonance imaging. *J Child Orthop*. 2016;10(4):343-352. doi:10.1007/s11832-016-0752-6

29. Ruiz Santiago F, Láinez Ramos-Bossini AJ, Wáng YXJ, Martínez Barbero JP, Espinosa JG, Martínez Martínez A. The value of magnetic resonance imaging and computed tomography in the study of spinal disorders. *Quant Imaging Med Surg.* 2022;12(7):3947-3986. doi:10.21037/qims-2022-04
30. Ozturk C, Karadereler S, Ornek I, Enercan M, Ganiyusufoglu K, Hamzaoglu A. The role of routine magnetic resonance imaging in the preoperative evaluation of adolescent idiopathic scoliosis. *Int Orthop.* 2010;34(4):543-546. doi:10.1007/s00264-009-0817-y
31. Toader C, Ples H, Covache-Busuioc RA, et al. Decoding Chiari Malformation and Syringomyelia: From Epidemiology and Genetics to Advanced Diagnosis and Management Strategies. *Brain Sci.* 2023;13(12):1658. doi:10.3390/brainsci13121658
32. Kular S, Cascella M. Chiari Malformation Type 1. *StatPearls.* Published online February 9, 2024. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK554609/>
33. Iftikhar W, De Jesus O. Spinal Dysraphism and Myelomeningocele. *StatPearls.* Published online August 23, 2023. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32491654/>
34. Kadom N, Reddy K, Cooper M, Knight-Scott J, Jones R, Palasis S. Diagnostic Excellence in Pediatric Spine Imaging: Using Contextualized Imaging Protocols. *Diagnostics.* 2023;13(18):2973. doi:10.3390/diagnostics13182973
35. Sener U, Kumthekar P, Boire A. Advances in the diagnosis, evaluation, and management of leptomeningeal disease. *Neurooncol Adv.* 2021;3(Supplement_5):v86-v95. doi:10.1093/noajnl/vdab108
36. Pirker W, Katzenschlager R. Gait disorders in adults and the elderly. *Wien Klin Wochenschr.* 2017;129(3-4):81-95. doi:10.1007/s00508-016-1096-4
37. Marshall FJ. Approach to the elderly patient with gait disturbance. *Neurol Clin Pract.* 2012;2(2):103-111. doi:10.1212/CPJ.0b013e31825a7823
38. Stanford Medicine. Gait Abnormalities. The Stanford Medicine 25. <https://stanfordmedicine25.stanford.edu/the25/gait.html>
39. Tetreault L, Kalsi-Ryan S, Benjamin Davies, et al. Degenerative Cervical Myelopathy: A Practical Approach to Diagnosis. *Global Spine J.* 2022;12(8):1881-1893. doi:10.1177/21925682211072847