

REFRAMING MRI ABNORMALITIES AS A NORMAL PART OF AGEING

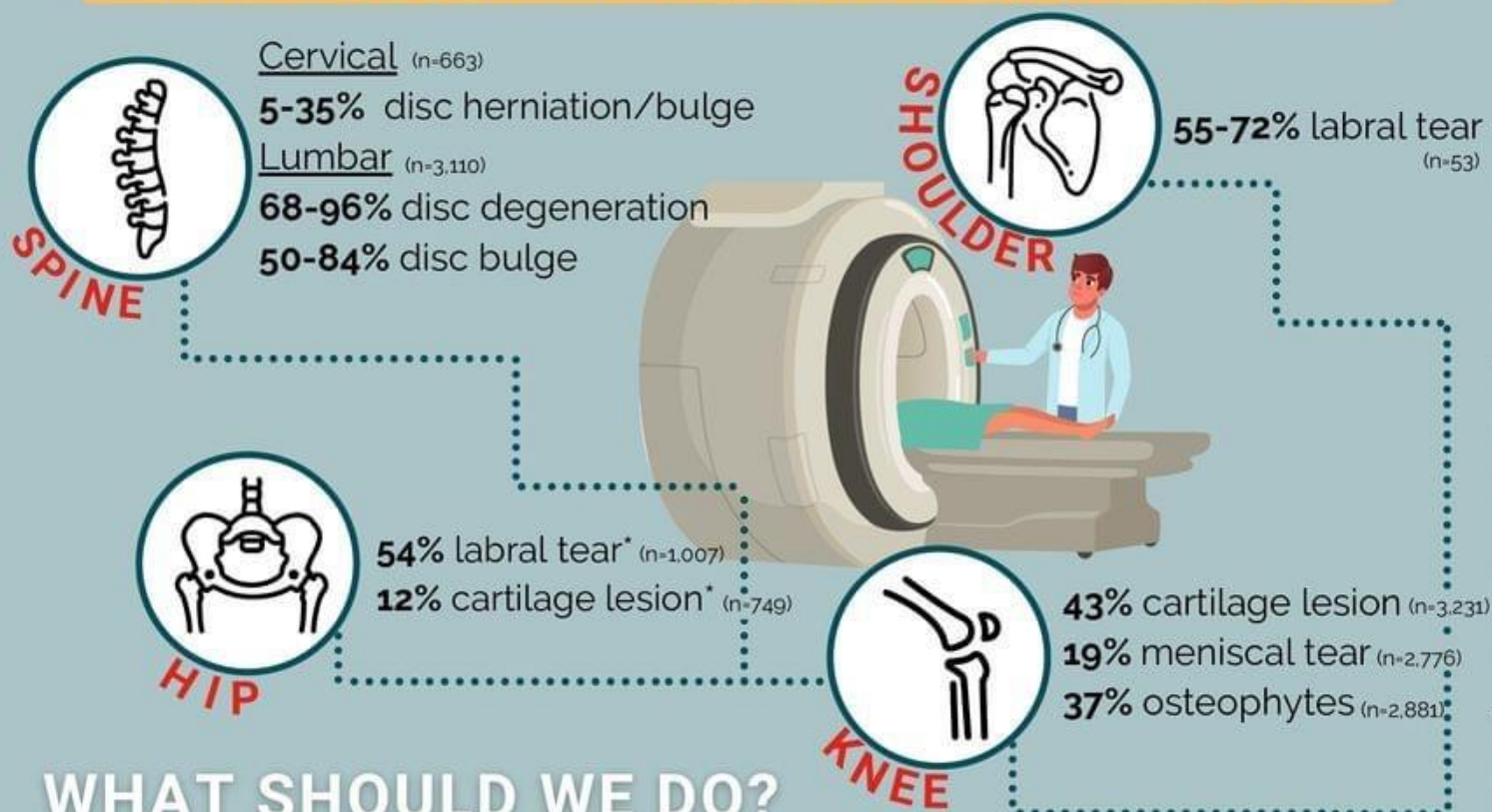


WHAT DO WE KNOW?

- MRI findings of joint deterioration are often interpreted as causes of pain triggering costly medical treatments and surgery.
- But many of these MRI changes do not cause pain - they are instead part of normal ageing.

WHAT DO WE SEE?

MRI findings are common in asymptomatic people >40 years



WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

- 1 **Treat the patient, not the scan!**
- 2 **Recognise** that many so-called "abnormal" findings are just a normal part of ageing and don't need "fixing"
- 3 **Discuss MRI findings with patients** in the context of asymptomatic populations to minimise fear of damage
- 4 **Language matters** - shift from "degenerative" labels to "normal age-related changes"



* More evidence is needed to confirm if points 3 & 4 improve outcomes

References:

Cervical Spine: D'Antoni & Croft, J Whiplash Rel Dis 2006
Lumbar Spine: Brinjikji et al., AJNR Am J Neuroradiol 2015
Shoulder: Schwartzberg et al., Orthop J Sports Med 2016
Knee: Culvenor et al., Br J Sports Med 2019
Hip: Heerey et al., Br J Sports Med 2018 (*includes data from adults of all ages)



Imaging is useful for the differential diagnosis of many conditions, including ruling out serious diseases that can present as musculoskeletal pain, and should be used with appropriate clinical reasoning