Early Rheumatoid Arthritis Detection Through MRI

by AMY MANLEY

What to Expect From an MRI for RA

The use of an x-ray has been used for decades as an effective way of finding RA present within the bones. Due to the progressive damage to the bones seen in RA patients, x-rays were thought to be the most effective tool for finding RA in a patient, and then offering treatment based upon the find. What many patients and medical professionals don't realize is that x-rays can actually be deceiving, especially during the early stages of RA. By learning more about diagnosing RA, why x-rays aren't always effective, and what methods of detection are most accurate, you'll be able to ensure your RA is detected right away and you get the treatment you need to slow progression.

Why X-Rays Aren't Effective

X-rays are one of the oldest medical tools on the market. While this tool is still effectively for a variety of image-detection needs, it cannot be relied upon when it comes to detecting RA. The reason x-rays are not always effective is because while they see the surface of the bone, they cannot see inside of the bone. During the early stages of RA, the damage may be present within the bone, and it's not until damage spreads to the outside of the bone that it will appear on an x-ray. Allowing the damage to spread before getting treatment, makes the condition worse and makes treatment more difficult.

Why MRIs Work

Rather than using x-rays, it's suggested that MRIs are used to detect RA. MRIs are newer imaging tools than the standard x-ray, and can clearly show the presence of RA. When a MRI is used for detection, the results are almost fool-proof. MRIs can show damage within the bone, but can also find symptoms of RA that generally go unnoticed, called non-bony signs. While these do not pose much of a risk, the earlier they are detected, the better.

MRIs can also find sacks of fluid within the joints, inflammation in the joints and lining, and other similar symptoms that are said to be caused by RA.

If your doctor feels that you have RA, you may be sent for an MRI. If your doctor suggests the use of an x-ray instead, consider pushing for an MRI and explaining why. By using the right testing method from the start, you can ensure your RA doesn't go without the treatment it needs.