INTRODUCTION:

Abdominal magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a proven and useful tool for the diagnosis, evaluation, assessment of severity and follow-up of diseases of the abdomen. It is more expensive than computed tomography (CT) but it avoids exposing the patient to ionizing radiation. MRI may be the best imaging procedure for patients with allergy to radiographic contrast material or renal failure. It may also be the procedure of choice for suspected lesions that require a technique to detect subtle soft-tissue contrast and provide a three-dimensional depiction of a lesion. Abdominal MRI studies are usually targeted for further evaluation of indeterminate or questionable findings, identified on more standard imaging exams such as Ultrasound (US) and CT.

Magnetic resonance cholangiopancreatography (MRCP) is a non-invasive radiologic technique for imaging the biliary and pancreatic ducts, and it is used to evaluate patients with cholestatic liver function tests, right upper quadrant pain, and recurrent pancreatitis. The MRCP uses magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to produce detailed pictures of the pancreas, liver and bile ducts. MRCP is reliable for the diagnosis of ductal abnormalities, e.g., pancreas divisum. It is also used to diagnose bile duct stones and assess the level of obstruction. MRCP is especially useful when a noninvasive exam is desired.

INDICATIONS FOR ABDOMEN MRI:

Evaluation of suspicious known mass/tumors (unconfirmed diagnosis of cancer) for further evaluation of indeterminate or questionable findings:

- Initial evaluation of suspicious abdomen masses/tumors found only in the abdomen by physical exam or imaging study, such as Ultrasound (US).
- Surveillance: One follow-up exam to ensure no suspicious change has occurred in a tumor in the abdomen. No further surveillance unless tumor(s) are specified as highly suspicious, or change was found on last follow-up.

Evaluation of known cancer for further evaluation of indeterminate or questionable findings, identified by physical examination or imaging exams such as Ultrasound (US) and CT:

- Initial staging of known cancer
  - All cancers, excluding the following:
    - Excluding Basal Cell Carcinoma of the skin,
    - Excluding Melanoma without symptoms or signs of metastasis.
• Three (3) month follow-up of known abdominal cancer undergoing active treatment within the past year.
• Six (6) month follow-up of known abdominal cancer undergoing active treatment within the past year.
• Follow-up of known cancer of patient undergoing active treatment within the past year.
• Known cancer with suspected abdominal metastasis based on a sign, symptom or an abnormal lab value.
• Surveillance after known cancer: Once per year [last test must be over ten (10) months ago before new approval] for surveillance of known cancer.

For evaluation of suspected infection or inflammatory disease:
• Suspected acute appendicitis (or severe acute diverticulitis) if abdominal pain and tenderness to palpation is present, with at LEAST one of the following:
  o WBC elevated
  o Fever
  o Anorexia or
  o Nausea and vomiting.
• Suspected peritonitis (from any cause) if abdominal pain and tenderness to palpation is present, and at LEAST one of the following:
  o Rebound, rigid abdomen, or
  o Severe tenderness to palpation present over entire abdomen.
• Suspected pancreatitis with abnormal elevation of amylase or lipase results.
• Suspected inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn’s or Ulcerative colitis) with abdominal pain, and persistent diarrhea, or bloody diarrhea.
• Suspected cholecystitis with recent equivocal ultrasound.
• Suspected infection in the abdomen ordered by Surgeon, Infectious Disease Specialist, Urologist, Nephrologist, Gynecologist, Gastroenterologist or primary care provider on behalf of identified specialist who has seen the patient.

For evaluation of known infection or inflammatory disease follow up:
• Complications of diverticulitis with severe abdominal pain or severe tenderness, not responding to antibiotic treatment, (prior imaging study is not required for diverticulitis diagnosis).
• Pancreatitis by history, (including pancreatic pseudocyst) with abdominal pain suspicious for worsening, or re-exacerbation.
• Known inflammatory bowel disease, (Crohn’s or Ulcerative colitis) with recurrence or worsening signs/symptoms requiring re-evaluation.
• Any known infection that is clinically suspected to have created an abscess in the abdomen.
• Any history of fistula limited to the abdomen that requires re-evaluation, or is suspected to have recurred.
• Abnormal fluid collection seen on prior imaging that needs follow-up evaluation.
• Hepatitis C/hepatoma evaluation with elevated alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) and equivocal ultrasound results.
• Known infection ordered by Surgeon, Infectious Disease Specialist, Urologist, Nephrologist, Gynecologist, Gastroenterologist or primary care provider on behalf of identified specialist who has seen the patient.
Evaluation of suspected or known vascular disease (e.g., aneurysms or hematomas):
- Evidence of vascular abnormality seen on imaging studies.
- Evaluation of suspected or known aortic aneurysm limited to abdomen
  - Suspected or known aneurysm ≤ four (4) cm AND equivocal or indeterminate ultrasound results OR
  - Prior imaging demonstrated aneurysm ≥ four (4) cm in diameter OR
  - Suspected complications of known aneurysm as evidenced clinical findings such as new onset of abdominal pain.
- Scheduled follow-up evaluation of aorto/iliacl endograft.
  - Asymptomatic at six (6) month intervals, for two (2) years
  - Symptomatic/complications related to stent graft – more frequent imaging may be needed
- Suspected retroperitoneal hematoma or hemorrhage.

Pre-operative evaluation:
- For abdominal surgery or procedure.

Post-operative/procedural evaluation:
- Follow-up of suspected or known post-operative complication involving only the abdomen.
- A follow-up study to help evaluate a patient’s progress after treatment, procedure, intervention or surgery. Documentation requires a medical reason that clearly indicates why additional imaging is needed.

Indication for combination studies for the initial pre-therapy staging of cancer, OR ongoing tumor/cancer surveillance OR evaluation of suspected metastases:
- < 5 studies to include CT or MRI of any of the following areas as appropriate depending on the cancer: Neck, Abdomen, Pelvis, Chest, Brain, Cervical Spine, Thoracic Spine or Lumbar Spine.

Other Indications for an Abdominal MRI:
- For location or evaluation of undescended testes in adults and in children, including determination of location of testes, where ultrasound has been done previously.
- To provide an alternative to abdominal CT when CT would be limited due to allergy to radiographic contrast material.
- To provide an alternative to follow-up of an indeterminate abdomen CT when previous CT/Ultrasound was equivocal and needed to clarify a finding a CT could not.
- Suspected adrenal mass or pheochromocytoma based on diagnostic testing/imaging results, and/or a suspicious clinical presentation.

INDICATIONS FOR MRCP:
- For evaluation of patient with suspected congenital anomaly of the pancreaticobiliary tract, e.g., aberrant ducts, choledochal cysts, pancreas divisum.
- For evaluation of patient with complications of chronic pancreatitis.
- For evaluation of an enlarged liver (on US, or prior CT/MR imaging) and/or liver inflammation w/non-diagnostic lab work up.
- For the evaluation of the complications of congenital anomalous pancreaticobiliary disease.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELATED TO ABDOMINAL MRI:

MRI imaging – Metal devices or foreign body fragments within the body, such as indwelling pacemakers and intracranial aneurysm surgical clips that are not compatible with the use of MRI, may be contraindicated. Other implanted metal devices in the patient as well as external devices such as portable O₂ tanks may also be contraindicated.

Intravascular administration of contrast material may be contraindicated in patients who have a documented allergy from prior contrast administration or a history of atopy. Intravascular contrast agents may be contraindicated in patients who have impaired renal function.

MRI of the liver – The liver is a common site of metastatic spread. Patients with a history of known or suspected malignancy, especially tumors from the colon, lung, pancreas and stomach, are at risk for developing hepatocellular carcinoma. Patients with chronic liver disease are also at risk for developing liver cancer and undergo periodic liver screening for focal liver lesion detection, usually with ultrasonography (US). Extra-cellular gadolinium chelate contrast-enhanced MRI is used for evaluating patients with an abnormal US. Patients with hepatic metastases being considered for metastasectomy undergo contrast-enhanced MRI using tissue-specific contrast agents.

MRI of the adrenal glands – The adrenal glands are susceptible for metastases from various tumors, especially of lung or breast. Adrenal lesions may also represent primary tumors of the adrenal cortex of medulla, both benign and malignant. MRI may be done to distinguish between benign and malignant lesions. Metastases are predominantly hypointense on T1-weighted images and hyperintense on T2-weighted images. Benign lesions, which have high lipid content, exhibit clear suppression of the signals.

MRI of the pancreas – The most common pancreatic endocrine tumors, accounting for up to 50% of all cases, are insulinomas, which are usually benign. The next most common is gastrinomas. Patients with gastrinomas generally present with recurrent, multiple or ‘ectopic’ peptic ulceration, the Zollinger-Ellison syndrome. After a diagnosis of gastrinomas has been confirmed, imaging should be done to localize and stage the disease. Other pancreatic endocrine tumors are rare and often associated with genetic disorders such as the multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1 (MEN 1). MRI is the preferred imaging for follow-up in patients with MEN 1 where repeated imaging may be required to assess the response to therapy.

MRI of the kidney – MRI in renal imaging has been used to differentiate benign lesions versus malignant lesions in patients unable to undergo CT scanning with contrast media or in cases where the CT findings were questionable. Initial evaluation of renal lesions is often undertaken with ultrasound. MRI can have additional diagnostic value in the evaluation of lesions with minimal amounts of fat or with intracellular fat. MRI may have a higher accuracy than CT in the evaluation of early lymph node spread. Although MRI of the kidney has not yet found broad clinical application, it may have an increasing role in the management of patients with renal disease.
MRI of the spleen – Among some radiologists, the spleen is considered a ‘forgotten organ’ although it is included and demonstrated on every abdominal CT and MRI. Malignant tumors of the spleen are rare; malignant lymphomas are the most common and are usually a manifestation of generalized lymphoma. Splenic metastases are predominantly hypointense on T1-weighted images and hyperintense on T2-weighted images and MRI is used for the detection of necrotic or hemorrhagic metastases.

MRI to diagnose abdominal aortic aneurysm – MRI can be useful in the diagnosis of aortic aneurysms in patients with chronic aortic disease. The advantages include: safety, noninvasive nature (except for intravenous contrast), wide field of view, multi-planar imaging and 3D relationship viewing. MRI, unlike CT, does not require large volumes of iodinated contrast. ECG-gated spin-echo MRI is the basis for many MRI imaging algorithms for diagnosing abdominal aortic disease. A rapid breath holds MRI, a more recent development, allows more comprehensive examination of the aorta and defines many types of aortic pathology.

MRI for the evaluation of vascular abnormalities such as renal artery stenosis and celiac/superior mesenteric artery stenosis (in chronic mesenteric ischemia) – Doppler Ultrasound, MRA or CTA should be considered as the preferred imaging modalities.

MRI to locate and evaluate undescended testes (UDT) in a child – When the testis is not located during the clinical examination (preferably by a physician with experience in small genital examination), tests such as US, CT or MRI imaging studies are considered to locate and evaluate the UDT. Ultrasound is the method of choice as it does not use ionizing radiation and is cost effective, child-friendly and easily available. MRI is used to locate and evaluate UDT after the US has been done.

Ultrasound – Ultrasound is the initial imaging technique used for screening suspected biliary or pancreatic disease, but it has limited ability to characterize abnormalities in the biliary and pancreatic ducts.

Endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) – ERCP can combine diagnosis with therapeutic intervention, e.g., removal of stones, but it is an invasive procedure that carries significant risk of complications, e.g., pancreatitis. ERCP is also technically challenging in patients with post-surgical biliary and/or surgical anastomoses.

Magnetic resonance Cholangiopancreatography (MRCP) – MRCP is a noninvasive method for depicting biliary and pancreatic ducts and assessing the level of obstruction. It is also used to evaluate congenital anomalies of these structures. MRCP does not require the use of any contrast materials. Unlike ERCP, it does not combine diagnosis with therapeutic intervention. MRCP is not cost effective if the patient will need ERCP mediated intervention after the MRCP. MRCP is preferred over ERCP when a noninvasive examination is needed or when there is a very small likelihood that the patient will need therapeutic intervention afforded by ERCP.
REFERENCES FOR ABDOMEN MRI


REFERENCES FOR MRCP


