

Potential Red Flags for Spinal Imaging

The following historical details and clinical signs/symptoms may warrant radiographic evaluation and/or advanced imaging:



HISTORY

- Recent significant trauma
- Night sweats
- Corticosteroid use
- Prior spinal surgery
- IV drug use/immunosuppressive therapy
- Unexplained weight loss
- Significant fatigue/malaise
- Abnormal serologic study
- Advanced age
- Insidious symptom onset
- Underlying medical condition (including, but not limited to)
 - Malignancy
 - Infection
 - Inflammatory arthritis
 - Significant osteoporosis
 - Diabetes (advanced/poorly controlled)
- Pain characteristics:
 - Unusually severe
 - Non-mechanical
 - Nocturnal, or pain at rest (particularly supine)
 - Sudden onset with local spinal tenderness



CLINICAL

- Fever
- Neurological findings:
 - Significant/progressive motor or sensory
 - Bilateral radicular
 - Cauda equina: saddle anesthesia, bowel or bladder disturbance, impotence
- Suspected spinal instability
- Spinal deformity/scoliosis
- Poor response to conservative treatment

References

