

## Upper Extremity MRI Pre-Auth & Coding Guidance

Upper extremity MRI coding — and the corresponding authorization request — hinges on one distinction: joint vs. non-joint structure.

### **Provider orders should specify:**

- ▶ Whether the study is joint or non-joint
- ▶ Anatomical location

### **When Imaging Focus Is Unclear**

Seek clarification if an order fails to define joint vs. non-joint. If unobtainable before submission, requesting authorization for both types may be warranted to prevent coding mismatches and care delays. Document the clinical ambiguity and rationale for the dual request in the patient record.

### **Example:**

- ▶ Joint pain with suspected tendon involvement

Final code selection is based on the structure evaluated and documented in the radiology report.

### **Authorization by MRI Type**

#### **Joint MRI Clearly Indicated**

Imaging involves a **joint**: hand (MCP), finger (PIP, DIP, IP), wrist, elbow, or shoulder

#### **Conditions include:**

- ▶ MCP joint pain or instability
- ▶ IP, PIP, or DIP osteoarthritis
- ▶ Collateral ligament injury
- ▶ Inflammatory arthritis or synovitis

**Codes:** 73221–73223 *MRI, any joint of upper extremity*

#### **Non-Joint MRI Clearly Indicated**

Imaging involves **non-joint** structures: soft tissue (i.e., hand, finger) or long bones (radius, ulna, humerus)

#### **Conditions include:**

- ▶ Flexor/extensor tendon injury or scarring
- ▶ Soft tissue mass or tumor
- ▶ Suspected infection or abscess
- ▶ Soft tissue swelling or pain

**Codes:** 73218–73220 *MRI, upper extremity, other than joint*

## Quick Reference: Upper Extremity MRI Pre-Auth Decision Guide

**Ask:** What structure is the MRI evaluating?

Clinical Focus	Examples	Authorization Request
Joint	joint pain, arthritis, ligament injury	MRI joint of upper extremity
Non-joint soft tissue	soft tissue mass, infection, swelling, tendon injury	MRI upper extremity, other than joint
Unclear or mixed	Joint pain with infection and swelling of 3 <sup>rd</sup> digit	Seek clarification; if not feasible beforehand, MRI upper extremity, joint and non-joint