

# Deep Learning-Based Image Recognition for Medical Diagnostics

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**Abstract:** *The integration of Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs), Machine Learning (ML), Deep Learning (DL), and Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) is revolutionizing medical imaging and diagnostics. ANNs utilize a layered architecture and iterative training to refine accuracy by adjusting weights based on errors. DL further enhances this by managing large datasets and abstracting complex features through deep structures. CNNs, a specialized form of DL, excel in image analysis through convolution and pooling layers, improving feature extraction and precision. Radiomics builds on these advancements by correlating imaging features with clinical outcomes, marking a shift from scalar to pixel-based data analysis. This evolution enhances predictive capabilities for treatment responses and outcomes. However, the adoption of AI in healthcare faces challenges such as data quality, workflow integration, and ethical considerations. Addressing these concerns—ensuring robust data management, patient confidentiality, and regulatory compliance—is crucial. Ongoing focus on patient-centered design and interdisciplinary collaboration will be essential to fully realize AI's transformative potential in healthcare.*

**Keywords:** *Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs), Deep Learning (DL), Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), Radiomics, Medical Imaging*

## 1. Introduction

Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) are computational models inspired by the human brain, consisting of interconnected nodes organized into layers. Each node processes inputs using weighted connections, with the network's goal being to minimize errors through iterative adjustments of these weights. Deep Learning (DL), an advanced form of Machine Learning (ML), utilizes ANNs with many layers to represent complex abstractions and perform detailed analyses. In medical imaging, DL often employs Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs), which excel in extracting features from images through convolution and pooling layers. CNNs apply filters to image patches to identify patterns and features, reducing data complexity while preserving critical information. This process involves convolutional layers followed by pooling

layers that downsample feature maps, culminating in a flattened array input to a neural network. Radiomics, which extracts quantitative features from medical images, benefits from these techniques by providing detailed insights into disease characteristics. CNNs, by analyzing these features, can enhance diagnostic accuracy and predict treatment outcomes. The integration of AI in medical imaging relies on large datasets and sophisticated algorithms to improve accuracy and generalizability, while also addressing challenges such as data privacy and the need for diverse datasets.

## 2. Basics of ANN, ML, DL, and CNN

An Artificial Neural Network (ANN) consists of nodes that can number from hundreds to millions, organized into multiple layers (depth). Deep Learning (DL), which employs ANNs with many layers (e.g., more than six), is

seen as an advanced form of Machine Learning (ML). DL can conduct more detailed analyses by integrating extensive data and representing higher levels of abstraction. Each node in the network processes inputs from other nodes, with these inputs weighted. The goal of an ANN is to maximize accuracy by adjusting node weights based on errors calculated during forward propagation. Over successive iterations (epochs), the solution becomes progressively more accurate, a process similar to iterative reconstruction. The training phase benefits most from a large dataset. With each iteration, improvements become incrementally smaller. A secondary, typically smaller dataset is often used to validate the results, reflecting much of the current research. In medical imaging, large datasets are crucial for training ML and DL algorithms effectively. DL, characterized by its deep layer structure, is commonly associated with Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) for feature extraction from images.

Consider a basic ANN with multiple input features and a binary output (disease or no disease). The architecture includes scaling layer inputs, several hidden layers with nodes arranged in specific configurations, along with an unscaling and probabilistic output layer. The scaling layer adjusts the input data to a predetermined range. Each node (perceptron) in the hidden layers receives weighted inputs and sums them with a bias to produce a net input value. This value is then processed by an activation function, typically linear or logistic (sigmoidal), to determine the node's output. Although each node produces a single output, this output serves as input for multiple nodes in the subsequent layer. The ANN's probabilistic output function follows the unscaling layer.

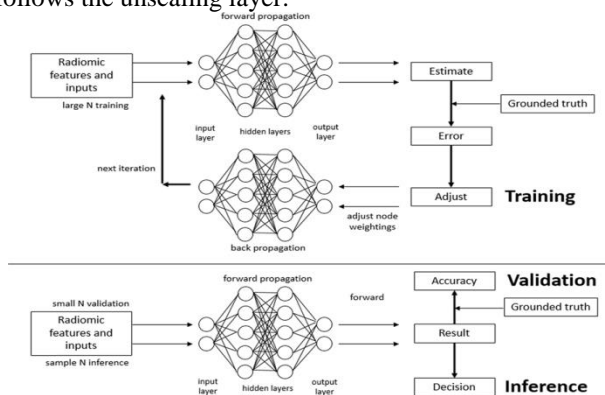


Fig. 1 ANN using extracted radiomic features as inputs with a grounded truth in this supervised ANN being used for training and validation phases. After validation, the forward propagation could be used to make inferences about inputs without a grounded truth.

To train and optimize the ANN, a loss index is utilized to assess both the error term and the regularization term. The

sum of these terms constitutes the loss index. If the loss surpasses a predetermined threshold, an optimization algorithm adjusts weights and biases by back-propagating errors from the output layers towards the input layers. This iterative process continues, minimizing the loss index until the target value is achieved. An epoch denotes one complete pass of the dataset through the network, including forward and backward propagation. For large datasets, which cannot be processed in a single batch, the data is divided into smaller batches. Each batch undergoes forward and backward propagation, referred to as an iteration. Completing all batches constitutes an epoch.

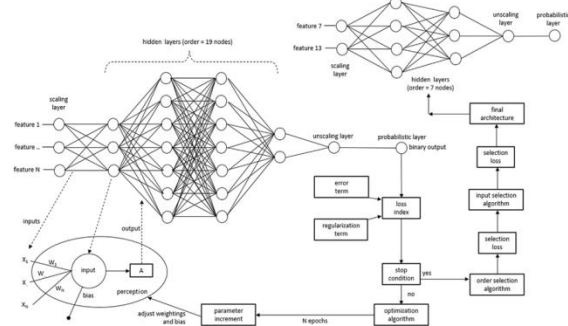


Fig. 2 Overview of the anatomy of an ANN. ANN, artificial neural network

The loss function estimates the error between predictions and the grounded truth, while selection loss measures the error related to generalizability to new data. Both contribute to refining the final architecture of the ANN, which may involve adjustments to the number of nodes in the hidden layers. The architecture aims to minimize errors associated with the order and number of inputs by considering selection loss. Order selection defines the ANN's depth and the number of nodes in hidden layers, balancing data complexity with network depth to avoid overfitting or underfitting. Input selection identifies the most relevant inputs to include, as some inputs may be redundant and increase error. The input selection algorithm finds the combination and subset of inputs that minimize selection error.

A Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) consists of convolution and pooling layers that extract features from images and produce a classification output. Convolution layers apply a kernel (typically  $3 \times 3$ ) to an input tensor (a subset of pixels) to extract features. The kernel moves across the input tensor with a specified stride, which is the distance between successive positions. A stride greater than 1 can be left until pooling. The product of each pixel and the kernel is summed to generate a numerical value in the feature map. Multiple convolution layers use different kernels to create various feature maps, which are then

processed through an activation function, typically the rectified linear unit, before entering the pooling layer.

The pooling layer reduces the computational resources required by downsampling the feature maps, often using max pooling. Max pooling selects the maximum value from a patch of the feature map, such as using a  $2 \times 2$  filter with a stride of 2, where each set of 4 elements is represented by the maximum value. This process helps select the most representative patch of data, such as distinguishing between vertical and horizontal edges. Sequential convolution, kernel, and pooling steps create multiple data layers, which are then transformed into a one-dimensional array through a process known as flattening.

### 3. Value of AI in Radiomic Feature Extraction and Selection

Radiomics, a term introduced by Lambin et al, refers to the extraction of meaningful imaging features from radiological data, including nuclear medicine images. The primary goal of radiomics is to correlate these features with patient outcomes to advance precision medicine. In oncology, this involves collecting and processing medical images, outlining the lesion of interest, extracting radiomic features, and using these insights along with traditional semantic analysis to predict treatment outcomes or responses (see Figure 4).

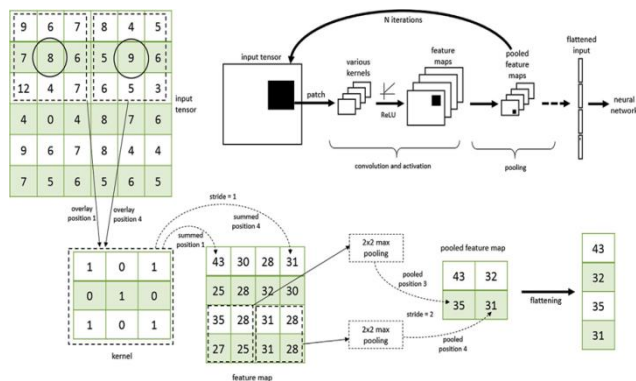


Figure 3. The CNN has a number of convolution and pooling layers before flattening and input to the neural network. Schematic representation of convolution using a  $3 \times 3$  kernel to run sequential (in this case, successive to provide a stride of 1)  $3 \times 3$  array of elements. The weighted sum of the kernel for the  $3 \times 3$  input tensor creates a single representative value in the feature map.

Multiple feature maps are produced by different kernels. Pooling using the max pool method and a  $2 \times 2$  array produces pooling of the maximum count among 4 connected elements (patch) to represent those data in the pooled feature map. Consecutive blocks of  $2 \times 2$  elements

means a stride of 2. The final pooled feature map immediately before input into the neural network can then be flattened from two-dimensional data into a single dimension; this approach avoids the need for global pooling.

Traditionally, radiomic features provide a single scalar value to characterize a complete three-dimensional (3D) tumor volume. However, recent research has shifted towards pixel-based features, which generate multiple values per feature for a 3D tumor volume. These features can be input into a classifier, such as a decision tree, to identify the features most strongly associated with outcomes. The classifier evaluates features starting with the one most correlated with outcomes and progresses through the tree with subsequent features. This process allows machine learning to identify the most significant features and their combinations, reducing redundancy—features that are strongly correlated with others—and minimizing error conflation. Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) are data-driven and their results depend on the quality of the input data. In radiology and nuclear medicine, images may be processed by a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN), or extracted radiomic features can serve as inputs for an ANN. CNNs are particularly effective at identifying and extracting radiomic features from images and linking them to outcomes for better results.

In oncology, the challenge is whether to simplify 3D tumor data into scalar radiomic features or to use raw 3D data directly in a CNN. While data-driven approaches like CNNs can be very powerful, they also carry a risk of overfitting to the original training data, which may limit their generalizability to new, unseen data.

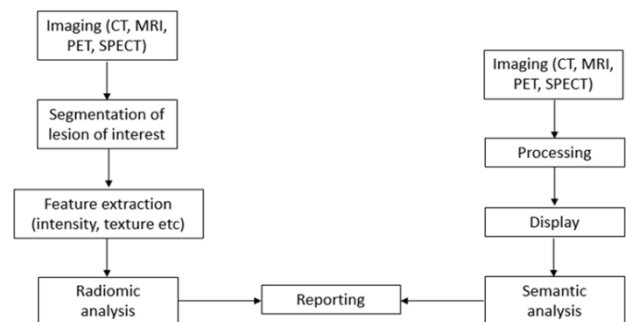


Fig 4 The radiomics workflow and integration with traditional (semantic) evaluation

Recent advancements involve the use of 3D conditional generative adversarial networks, which consist of a generator and a discriminator network working in opposition. These networks generate both positive and negative input data from the original dataset, enhancing the network's ability to generalize more effectively.

## 5. AI and Big Data, a Programmatic Perspective

### The Task Ahead

If AI is the engine driving future technology, then data is its fuel. Effective predictive AI models rely on large amounts of data that must be accessible, usable, and validated. Setting up an AI initiative requires significant investment in IT infrastructure to prepare this data. In imaging, this begins with creating an image warehouse for DICOM data, which should be stripped of patient identifiers or indexed to maintain confidentiality. Linking imaging data with clinical information is complex due to often poor integration between systems.

Data curation is also essential. AI algorithms need accurate "ground truth" for training, which involves manual annotation of images to ensure the algorithms can detect and respond correctly. Developing robust data archives for AI is crucial but challenging. Investments in infrastructure can support AI deployment, whether products are vendor-specific or need local configuration.

### The Value Question

Investing in AI for medical departments involves substantial costs, including hardware, software, and expert personnel. While such investments align with the goals of modern healthcare, their programmatic justification requires careful assessment. In clinical radiology, AI can significantly impact the diagnostic imaging cycle by aiding in the decision-making process for imaging procedures and enhancing image interpretation. AI algorithms can improve diagnostic accuracy by identifying critical findings earlier and more accurately than traditional methods. For instance, a 5% increase in sensitivity from an AI system could lead to earlier detection of diseases like breast cancer, which can profoundly affect patient outcomes. However, integrating AI into existing systems presents challenges, such as ensuring compatibility with current workflows and maintaining high-quality data. Ultimately, the decision to implement AI should weigh the potential benefits—such as improved diagnostic precision and faster detection—against the costs and logistical complexities of integration. As AI technology evolves and becomes more cost-effective, its adoption in medical diagnostics is likely to offer greater value.

### A Perspective on the Future

The impact of AI on radiology and nuclear medicine is rapidly evolving due to continuous technological advancements, which enhance performance and expand

applications. This dynamic landscape requires ongoing evaluation of AI's value to determine when and how to invest. While AI is anticipated to play a crucial role in the future of medicine, its implementation will differ across facilities.

To imagine AI's transformative potential, consider a scenario where an AI achieves flawless accuracy. Picture an AI capable of analyzing every pixel of contrast-enhanced CT scans of the chest, abdomen, and pelvis with precision beyond human capabilities, while integrating this data with all available demographic and clinical information. Such an AI could accurately predict hidden malignancies, assess coronary risk, and recommend dietary changes.

Although these scenarios might seem improbable with current technology, it would be premature to dismiss them entirely. The true potential of AI will become clearer as technology progresses and more data is accumulated. Currently, decisions on adopting AI involve balancing its benefits against existing programmatic considerations. In some instances, early adoption may be justified by the advantages offered, while in others, it might be wiser to wait. As AI technology advances, it is likely to be integrated into all stages of the radiology and nuclear medicine workflow—both visibly and behind the scenes. The pace of this integration will depend on ongoing technological developments and the tangible benefits AI brings to patient care. Institutions must continuously assess these factors to make informed decisions about AI investment and adoption.

## 6. DL in Diagnosis and Therapy

Deep learning (DL) applications in medical imaging are commonly cited for tasks such as object detection (e.g., locating lesions), object segmentation (e.g., outlining lesion contours), and object classification (e.g., distinguishing malignant from benign lesions) [21]. These tasks are often performed sequentially and serve various medical purposes. For instance, object detection is widely used in computer-aided diagnosis of mammograms to highlight potential tumors, as well as in CT scans of the lungs and liver. Object segmentation plays a crucial role in automated radiation therapy planning, where it helps delineate tumors and organs for targeted treatment and dose sparing. Additionally, radiomics relies on lesion classification, which depends on prior detection and segmentation.

However, these applications have been specific to particular tasks and lack general intelligence. Consequently, an AI model trained to segment the spleen





may not perform well on the liver without additional training. There are also several emerging applications being explored:

- **Triaging:** Classifying images as normal or abnormal and assessing the severity to prioritize urgent cases for radiological review.
- **Similar Images:** Finding previously encountered cases with similar findings to assist in learning and interpreting rare or subtle cases.
- **Image Enhancement:** Reducing noise in medical images (pre- or post-reconstruction) to improve image quality and lower radiation doses.
- **Image Reconstruction:** Directly transforming sinogram data into image space, bypassing traditional iterative methods.
- **Attenuation Correction from MRI:** Estimating CT attenuation correction maps from MRI data in PET/MR scans.
- **Multimodal Image Coregistration:** Using non-rigid image warping to address patient positioning differences across modalities.
- **Change Detection and Trending:** Identifying changes between baseline and follow-up studies to monitor disease progression or response to therapy.
- **Image Acquisition Optimization:** Guiding technologists in patient positioning, field-of-view delineation, and ultrasound probe placement.
- **Quality Assurance:** Monitoring machine performance to detect anomalies and predict maintenance needs.

## 7. Integrating DL into Clinical Workflow

Current applications in medical imaging are being developed to assist human observers, necessitating effective communication through machine-human interfaces. While simple tasks like indicating lesion presence and organ boundaries allow for human oversight to catch errors, more complex applications such as triaging or image enhancement might not be easily monitored by humans. Therefore, these systems must be thoroughly validated for robustness before being used independently in clinical settings. The manner in which AI findings are presented to radiologists or nuclear medicine physicians also requires careful consideration. Immediate AI results can introduce bias and lead to overreliance on the technology, while delayed results might cause practitioners to wait passively for computer-generated information. Providing definitive terms (e.g., benign/malignant) can obscure the underlying uncertainties, whereas probabilistic

information, while more accurate, can complicate interpretation and reduce the usefulness of the AI application.

An integrated human-machine interface could allow human observers to understand how the AI detected certain conditions and provide feedback to improve the system. This interaction could enhance AI performance and expand its applications. However, this approach raises regulatory issues: how to manage potential biases if a less skilled user provides feedback, and how to oversee evolving software versions. One potential solution is to transfer data management and training supervision to the software manufacturer, though this raises questions about data ownership. As AI systems advance, the role of the human-machine interface might shift to a simpler function of displaying results, potentially resolving some of these challenges.

## 8. AI Application in Medical Imaging

**AI and Design Thinking:** The concept of design thinking has significantly influenced technology and science over the years, and it is now crucial for the successful innovation and implementation of AI in medical imaging. Design thinking encourages addressing technological challenges from a human-centered perspective. In the realm of medical innovation, this approach emphasizes improving the patient experience and designing technology to achieve this goal. Such inquiries require diverse perspectives, making the design thinking process reliant on collaborative input. While radiologists and nuclear medicine physicians play a vital role in AI development, incorporating insights from various stakeholders—such as referrers, medical radiation technologists, administrators, industry professionals, and, most importantly, patients—is essential for successful outcomes.

**Data Usage and Development:** In designing and implementing new AI applications, understanding the core problem the AI is intended to address is fundamental. Thrall et al. distinguish between circumstantial challenges, which relate to human and societal behaviors, and intrinsic challenges, which involve the use of science and technology to devise innovative solutions. Communication and mutual understanding among physicians, scientists, technologists, industry leaders, and patients are crucial for developing effective AI applications. Without early and diverse input, AI projects may develop significant flaws, such as ethical issues in patient care or non-compliance with regulations. Additionally, homogeneous data can lead to ineffective solutions if it does not reflect the diversity of



the patient population. Ensuring diversity in thought and data is critical to the initial development process. Successful collaboration among technology developers, physicians, and scientists hinges on a shared understanding of both business realities and medical optimism.

**Implementation of Ideas:** Transitioning AI from the lab to clinical practice involves challenges similar to those faced by early imaging pioneers. Successful integration of AI into patient care requires both clinical professionals who understand and can interact with the technology and adaptable technology that evolves with clinical needs. Incorporating AI basics into medical school and residency curricula is vital for preparing future healthcare professionals to effectively use new technologies. Moreover, AI solutions must be designed to evolve and adapt, with performance monitoring, feedback, and quality control mechanisms in place. Effective implementation relies on clinicians understanding the technology and the technology itself being capable of adapting to advancements in medical imaging.

**Regulation of Technology:** As AI technologies become more prevalent in healthcare, regulatory and reimbursement issues are emerging. The integration of AI into existing billing models is a significant challenge, with some believing that AI should be a standard part of care rather than a separately billable service. AI's potential to reduce service costs might make additional billing unnecessary. In the U.S., the FDA has approved a limited number of AI-based imaging devices, emphasizing product quality, patient safety, and cybersecurity. European regulations follow a similar risk-based approach, often placing risk assessment responsibilities on technology developers or independent certification bodies.

**Ethics in AI:** Ethical considerations are crucial when using human data for AI applications. Key ethical issues include data privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, data ownership, objectivity, and inequity. These challenges underscore the need for a design thinking approach centered around patient interests. Ensuring that AI applications maintain patient trust and address ethical concerns is essential. As AI becomes more common in clinical settings, safeguarding patient data and managing liability for potential errors or breaches will be critical.

**The Patient Experience:** To truly understand the patient experience, involving patients in the design, implementation, and decision-making processes is essential. Patients value technology that is safe, enhances efficiency and care quality, facilitates personal interaction, and holds providers and developers accountable. AI applications have the potential to improve patient interactions by automating tasks, allowing healthcare professionals to focus more on meaningful engagement

with patients. This shift not only enhances patient satisfaction but also reaffirms the value of medical professionals. By embracing design thinking, addressing regulatory and ethical challenges thoughtfully, and keeping patients at the core of the process, AI can profoundly transform the field of medicine and improve global healthcare delivery.

## 9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the integration of Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs), Machine Learning (ML), Deep Learning (DL), and Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) is revolutionizing medical imaging and diagnostic processes. ANNs, with their layered architecture, rely on iterative training to refine accuracy through adjusting weights based on errors. DL, characterized by its deep structures, enhances this capability by managing large datasets and abstracting complex features. CNNs, a subset of DL, specialize in feature extraction from images through convolution and pooling layers, which improve the precision of image analysis. Radiomics further leverages these technologies to correlate imaging features with clinical outcomes, offering promising advancements in precision medicine. The shift from scalar to pixel-based radiomic features exemplifies the move towards more granular data analysis, enhancing the ability to predict treatment responses and outcomes. Despite the promising capabilities of AI in improving diagnostic accuracy and efficiency, challenges such as data quality, integration into existing workflows, and ethical considerations remain significant. Ensuring robust data management, maintaining patient confidentiality, and addressing regulatory concerns are crucial for the successful implementation of AI technologies. As technology evolves, continued focus on patient-centered design and interdisciplinary collaboration will be essential for leveraging AI's full potential in transforming healthcare.

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