

Patient Information

Having a Breast MRI Scan

Breast Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)

This information leaflet tells you about the scan, how to prepare and what will happen during your scan.

What is an MRI of the breast?

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a non-invasive medical imaging test with no radiation (no X-rays). It uses magnetism and radio waves to create detailed pictures of the breasts.

When is breast MRI used?

MRI of the breast is used for a number of reasons. It is not a replacement for mammograms (breast X-rays) or ultrasounds, but is used to provide extra information about your breasts.

Some of the reasons are:

- To investigate abnormalities detected by mammograms and ultrasound.
- To assess the extent of a diagnosed cancer prior to planning treatment.
- To measure the effect of chemotherapy or hormone therapy on breast cancers.
- To provide additional screening for some women who have an increased risk of breast cancer.
- To check the condition of breast implants.



Important information

Due to the powerful magnets used in MRI scanning, it is not suitable for everyone. Before the MRI, a radiographer will go through a safety checklist with you. It is very important that you tell us if you have:

- Any form of surgical implant.
- Pacemakers.
- Cochlear implants.
- Internal electronic devices.
- Artificial heart valves.
- Surgical clips, pins or plates.
- Metal fragments anywhere in your body – for example, from an injury.

If any of the above applies to you we may have to defer your MRI until we can get more information about your medical history but this is for your safety.

Clips are often used in breast imaging to mark an area in the breast at the time of a biopsy. If you have one of these clips in your breast it is unlikely to prevent you from having your MRI, but please tell us.

What to expect when you arrive at the radiology department:

- You will be met by a radiographer, who will check your personal details and go through a safety checklist with you.
- They will explain the procedure to you. Please feel free to ask any questions at this time.
- You will be asked to undress and change into a gown. You will need to remove any jewellery, including body piercings and your watch. A locker will be provided for your personal belongings.
- It is very important that you do not bring anything containing metal into the scanning room. Please leave all jewellery, credit cards, piercings, watches, mobile phones and any other metal objects in the locker provided.

What to expect in the scanning room:

- The radiographer will take you into the scanning room. The MRI machine is large and shaped like a doughnut.
- Breast MRI uses a gadolinium based contrast agent injected into your bloodstream, which helps to take detailed pictures of the breast.

- The radiographer will use a needle to introduce a small flexible plastic tube into a vein in your arm so that the contrast agent can be given at the appropriate time during your scan.



- You will then be asked to lie on your front on the MRI couch.
- The radiographer will assist you in placing your breasts in the correct receptacles which are located within the MRI couch.
- It is important that you lie absolutely still for at least 45 minutes. If at any time during the scan you are not comfortable, you can inform the radiographer.



Radiographer Sharon Pallister with patient having a breast MRI

- The couch then slowly moves into a set position in the MRI scanner. Images are then taken.
- The radiographer operates the MRI scanner from behind a partition. The radiographer will be able to see you throughout the procedure and you will be able to talk to each other through an intercom in the MRI scanner.
- The scan can last between 30 to 45 minutes.

Common questions

- **Can I eat and drink on the day of the MRI scan?** Yes, please eat and drink as normal. Please also take all of your medication as you normally would.
- **Does having a breast MRI hurt?** No, MRI scans do not hurt. It is normal to feel a slight flushing sensation when the injection is given. Some women may find lying on their front uncomfortable.
- **I have heard MRI scans are noisy, is this true?** The MRI makes a knocking or drumming noise. The character of the noise changes several times during your scan. This is very normal. You will be given headphones to reduce the noise, but you will still be able to hear what the radiographer says. If you would like, we can play music through these headphones.
- **I am feeling worried about having the scan, what can I do?** It's very normal to feel a bit anxious about having a MRI scan, especially if it is your first one. Here are some tips that you may find helpful to prepare for your scan and while you are having it:
 - You have the option to listen to music or relaxation tracks during the scan. If you have a favourite CD please bring this with you.
 - Remind yourself why you are having the scan (e.g. to review your health / get the best treatment possible) – knowing there are good reasons for having this MRI can help you get through it.
 - Know that it is normal to feel some anxiety during a procedure. Breathing slowly and gently can help relax your mind and body. It is important, however, not to take deep breaths as this can affect the quality of the scan pictures.
 - Remember that it will pass. Your radiographer will be able to give you an idea of how long the scan will be. If you would like time updates of how long you've been in the scanner and the time remaining, please let them know when you arrive on the day.
- **Can I have a breast MRI if I am pregnant or breast feeding?** MRI is not advised in the first three months of pregnancy. It is very important to tell the

radiographer if you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant or are breast feeding.

- **Are there any side effects?** There are no after-effects of the MRI scan itself, and you will be free to drive and return to work should you wish. In very rare cases, some women can have an allergic reaction to the contrast medium used in breast MRI. The radiographer and doctors are all trained to deal with such reactions.
- **How will I get my results?** How you receive the results of your MRI scan will depend on the reason for your scan and may be by letter, telephone or at an appointment in person. How you receive your results would have been arranged with you prior to your scan. A copy of your results will also be sent to your GP. Please be aware that the MRI could show additional findings that may require further investigations such as an ultrasound and breast biopsies.

Contact Details

Breast Unit Senior Radiographer: 01225 825888

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656 or 826319