

Having an MRI Scan

Information for Patients

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Introduction

This leaflet tells you about having a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan. It explains how the test is done, what to expect, and what the possible risks are. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is an MRI scan?

An MRI scan is a non-invasive way of looking inside your body to help diagnose medical conditions and guide treatment. An MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scanner is a short tunnel that is open at both ends. It uses a powerful magnet, radiowaves and a computer to produce images of the internal structures of the body. MRI does not use ionizing radiation (x-rays).



The scanner is operated by a Radiographer, who is a professional trained to carry out X-rays and other imaging procedures. The pictures are displayed on a computer workstation for examination by the Radiologist, who is a doctor specially trained to interpret the images and carry out more complex imaging examinations.

MRI scans provide good detail of internal organs, blood vessels and soft tissues so are often the preferred method of diagnosing and assessing a wide range of medical conditions such as cancers, infection, inflammation, cardiovascular disease, trauma and musculoskeletal disorders.

What do I need to do before my scan?

Dietary preparation.

There is no specific dietary preparation for most MRI scans. However, guidelines about eating and drinking before the procedure vary depending on the part of the body to be examined, and you should follow the instructions you are given with your appointment letter.

Taking tablets and medicines

You should continue to take all your normal medication. If you are diabetic using insulin, please contact the Radiology department for advice.

Females

Females are asked to contact the Radiology department if you suspect that you may be pregnant. There is no evidence that MRI is unsafe in pregnancy, but as a precaution, we do not perform MRI on pregnant ladies unless it is essential.

MRI Safety Questionnaire

The magnetic field used for MRI scans is very strong and can affect metal or electronic implants. You will be sent an MRI Safety questionnaire, which asks about any metal implants, such as artificial joints and stents, or electronic devices, such as a pacemaker, that you may have inside you. Please take time to read through and complete the questionnaire. If all of the answers are 'no' then please bring the completed questionnaire to your appointment. If, however there are answers that are 'yes', then please return the completed questionnaire immediately to the Radiology department or telephone the MRI appointments desk for advice.

Where do I go when I arrive at the hospital?

Please report to the reception desk in the Radiology department (B8) in good time with your appointment letter. Please click on the following link for a site map of the hospital:

http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/finding/documents/RUH_directory_map.pdf

You will be asked to sit in the waiting area until called by a member of staff. A member of the team will explain the test, go through the MRI safety questionnaire with you, and answer any questions.

Please let us know if you have any of the following conditions:

- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Known allergies

You will be shown to a private cubicle and asked to change into a clean gown. You may be allowed to wear your own clothing if it has no metal fasteners, zips or buckles.

Please do not wear items of jewellery, as they may need to be removed prior to the scan. Your clothes and valuables will be secured in a locker until after the procedure.

Can I bring a relative or friend?

You may bring a relative or friend with you to the appointment but, for reasons of safety, they will not be able to accompany you into the examination room, except in very special circumstances. If the patient is a young child or is un-cooperative, a parent or health worker may stay in the scanner room.

If you need an interpreter please tell us when you receive your appointment so that we can arrange this.

What happens during the MRI scan?

You will be taken into the MRI Scanning Room and asked to lie down on the moveable scanner table. A receiving device will be placed around the part of your body to be scanned. You will be moved into the scanner either head first or feet first, depending on the part of the body to be scanned. For an examination of the head/neck, you will need to be placed in the centre of the ring, so that your head will be in the middle of the scanner, but there is a periscope mirror to enable you to see out. You will be asked to remain still whilst the scans are taken.

At certain times during the procedure, the MRI scanner will make a loud knocking noise caused by the magnets in the machine being turned on and off. You will be given earplugs or headphones to wear. You are welcome to bring your own music CD with you to listen to through the headphones during the scan.

Occasionally a contrast material may be required during the examination. This will require a small tube, called a cannula, to be inserted into one of the veins in your arm. Additional scans will be performed after the contrast has been administered.

You will be alone in the MRI room during the scan but the Radiographer will be able to see, hear and speak with you at all times. The MRI scan may take between 15 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the part(s) of the body to be examined.

What happens after the scan?

You may eat and drink as normal and resume normal activities as soon as the scan is finished.

Are there any risks?

MRI is generally regarded as a very safe test. It is non-invasive and does not involve ionizing radiation. There is no known adverse effect of the magnetic field and radio waves used in MRI on living tissues.

A small proportion of people (2 – 5 %) find MRI examinations difficult because of the partly enclosed nature of the scanner, causing claustrophobia. Occasionally, mild sedation (relaxing tablets) may help to reduce the anxiety about being in a confined space. If you feel you will need a sedative please discuss this with your GP to obtain the prescription before your scan. If you have had a sedative for the procedure you are advised not to drive, travel alone or return to work for the rest of the day. You should arrange for someone to accompany you home after the test.

There is a slight risk of an allergic reaction if contrast material is injected. A Radiologist or other clinician will be available to assist if you experience any symptoms of an allergic reaction. Such reactions are usually mild and easily controlled by medication.

Despite these slight risks, your doctor believes it is advisable that you should have this examination, and do bear in mind there are greater risks from missing a serious disorder by not having your scan.

How do I get my results?

A specialist Radiologist will review the images from your MRI scan and send a report to your doctor. Your GP or hospital Consultant who referred you for the test will see you to discuss the results.

Any questions?

We will do our best to make your visit as comfortable and stress free as possible. If you have any questions, or suggestions for us, please contact MRI appointments on 01225 824072.

More information

For general information about Radiology departments, visit The Royal College of Radiologists' website: <https://www.rcr.ac.uk/public-and-media/what-expect-when>

How do I make a comment about my examination?

If you have any concerns or suggestions following your examination, please contact the [Patient Advice and Liaison Service \(PALS\)](#),
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust, Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG.
Email: ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net
Tel: 01225 821655 or 01225 826319