

What is an MRI scan?

Magnetic Resonance Imaging or MRI for short is a method of obtaining highly detailed pictures of the inside of your body. A powerful magnet, radio-waves and a computer are used. The technique does not use x-rays and there are no known side effects.

Will anything prevent me from having an MRI Scan?

Yes: an MRI scan may not suitable if you have any of the following:

- cardiac pacemaker or defibrillator
- aneurysm clips in your head
- inner ear (cochlear) implants
- metallic fragments in your eyes
- some cardiac surgery including pacemakers, implantable cardioverter defibrillator and some artificial heart valves
- nerve stimulators
- some vascular ports and access devices
- being pregnant

If you do have any of these please telephone the hospital department you are attending and we will be able to advise you appropriately.

If you have any other metallic implants, it is in most cases safe for you to have your scan, however if you have had metallic implants placed within the last 6 weeks it is important that you let us know.

Do I need any special preparation before the examination?

You will be advised in your appointment letter if you require any specific preparation instructions and it is important that you read your appointment letter carefully.

Continue to take any medication prescribed by your doctor unless advised not to in your appointment letter.

If possible, try to wear clothing without metal zip fastenings or clips. If this is not possible a hospital gown and changing facilities are provided.

Please do not wear make-up or mascara. Mascara contains 'ferric' (metal) compounds, which may lead to distortion of images.

If you wear glasses for reading, please bring them with you.

If possible, please try to leave the following personal items at home: watches, jewellery, credit cards, keys, hairgrips, cigarette lighters, coins, penknives and any other loose metallic objects.

If you do bring any personal items, you will be able to lock them away during your scan.

What happens before my scan?

When you arrive in the department you should report to the Radiology Reception desk, where your personal details will be checked to ensure that our records are accurate and up to date. You will then be directed towards the MRI waiting room and asked to hand in or complete a questionnaire.

A radiographer or assistant will then speak to you, checking through your questionnaire and also explain the scanning procedure to you. The radiographer or assistant will be able to answer any questions you may have regarding your scan.

What does the examination involve?

Depending upon which area of the body we are scanning, the examination will be performed slightly differently. As a general guide the area to be scanned needs to be positioned in the centre of the scanner. You will enter the scanner either head first or feet first depending upon the area.

A radiographer will escort you into the scanning suite and show you the scanner.

A special coil will be positioned around the area being scanned. This helps to obtain very high-quality images.

You will be moved into the scanner and your scan will begin.

During your scan you will hear some very loud tapping noises while the scanner is working. This is a normal part of the scan and nothing to worry about. You will be given ear protection to wear during your scan.

All that is expected of you while your scan is being performed is that you keep as still as possible. Certain areas of examination may require you to hold your breath for short periods of time. The radiographer will explain this to you prior to starting the scan.

The radiographers can talk to you through an intercom and you can also talk to them. The intercom can also be used to transmit music. We do have a small collection of CD's to listen to, or if preferred, you may bring your own.

Will I need an injection?

For some types of scans, a small injection will be administered into a vein in your arm. This can sometimes give us useful information. You should experience no side effects.

How does it feel?

Apart from the noise of the scanner and some associated vibrations you should not experience anything to cause any discomfort.

What if I feel anxious about my MRI scan or suffer from claustrophobia?

Some patients may be anxious about their MRI scan or suffer from claustrophobia. If you are worried about this, you should contact the department – we can arrange for you to visit the MR Unit, to talk the examination through with our staff and have a look at the MR Scanner itself. If you are still anxious, or have failed to complete a scan because you are claustrophobic, you can ask your GP if it is possible for him/her to prescribe appropriate sedation.

What if I am pregnant?

If you think you may be pregnant it is very important that you ring the department before your scan (contact numbers are listed in your appointment letter). From this information, x-ray staff will decide if there is cause for the MRI examination to be postponed or if it is appropriate to continue.

How long will the scan take?

Usually, your scan can last for anything between 20-60 minutes, although if more than one area is to be scanned, then your examination is likely to take proportionately longer.

When will I get my results?

After your scan has finished the radiographer will not be able to tell you the results. If you have come from home, the results will be sent back to the doctor who referred you for your scan. This process takes approximately 2-3 weeks, so unless other arrangements have been made you should expect to hear something after this time.

What are the benefits of having a MRI scan?

This examination will help us make a correct diagnosis so you will be able to be given the correct treatment.

What are the risks of having a MRI scan?

MRI scanning does not use x-rays and there are no known side effects.

Can I drive home?

Yes.