



# MRI scan

*Your questions  
answered*

Patient  
Information  
Series

## **What is an MRI scan?**

MRI stands for Magnetic Resonance Imaging. An MRI scanner uses a magnetic field and radio waves to build up detailed pictures of various parts of the body from the signals that are sent out from the water molecules in the body. Computer systems help with this but no x-rays are used.

## **Why am I having an MRI scan?**

MRI scans are investigations that can be used to help doctors to make a diagnosis or assess the effects of treatment. Your doctor will recommend an MRI scan based on the type of disease you have and the reason for the scan.

## **Who can have an MRI scan?**

Your doctor will decide if an MRI scan would be helpful in your case. However, some people aren't able to have this scan, for example if:

- You have a heart pacemaker
- You have had any of the valves in your heart replaced by metal ones
- You have aneurysm clips in your brain
- You have ever done any welding or metal work without wearing goggles, or have ever had metal fragments removed from your eyes

Please contact the MRI department if you think you may be pregnant. MRI scans may not be advisable in early pregnancy, unless there are special circumstances.

The radiographers, who carry out the scan, will ask you some questions. You will also be required to fill in a questionnaire about your health and medical history, and you may be asked to sign a consent form.

## **What preparation will I need?**

Usually there is no special preparation for an MRI scan. You may eat and drink normally before and after the scan, unless you have been told otherwise.

For abdominal and pelvic scans, you may be given medication before the scan. This will relax your bowel for a short time to improve the quality of the scan. You may not be able to drive for one hour after receiving this medication as it may cause blurring of vision. All instructions will be on your appointment letter, please read it carefully.

An injection of contrast medium (dye) may be given into a vein. This is not always necessary, but can provide the scan with extra information. As with all medication, a very small number of patients may be allergic to contrast medium. Please inform the radiographer if you have any allergies.

## **What happens when I come for the scan?**

When you come for your appointment it is advisable to wear clothing without metal fastenings. Alternatively we can provide a hospital gown or pyjamas.

You will not be allowed to take or wear

anything metallic or with magnetic strips into the scan room, except a wedding ring, You may wear your spectacles, they will be taken off immediately before your scan.

A locker is provided for your valuables. You must give the key to a radiographer, as it is magnetic.

## **Who will I see when I have my scan?**

As well as meeting reception staff, you will also meet radiographers who are trained to carry out the scans. You may also see a radiologist (a specialist doctor who is trained to interpret the results and carry out some of the more complex examinations).

## **Does the scan hurt?**

No, the scan isn't painful. However, you will have to lie still for up to one hour on a table which is quite hard. The radiographers will do their best to make you comfortable. If you have any pain or discomfort that could lead to difficulties with the scan, please tell the radiographer before your scan.

## **What happens during the scan?**

The scanner produces a variety of loud noises, which are produced by magnetic coils that switch on and off during the scan. These coils measure the signal coming from your body in order to make the images. Because these coils are switched on and off rapidly, they vibrate and cause the noise you hear. Ear defenders or earplugs will help reduce this.

Although the scanner is open at both ends, some people may find this claustrophobic.



If you are worried about this, please speak to the radiographer **before** you come for your scan. During the scan, the radiographer will be able to see you from the control room and you can talk to each other through an intercom. You will be given a call button to press and may be able to listen to music during the scan. The newer scanners are much shorter and wider than previously.

### How long will the scan take?

Scans can take between twenty minutes and an hour. If your scan is going to take longer, you will be told this when your appointment is made.

### What happens afterwards?

You may leave the department as soon as your scan is finished unless you were given a bowel relaxant before your scan. You may go to the toilet and eat and drink as usual. There are no side effects to the MRI scan itself.

## When will I know the results?

Although the radiographer can see parts of your body on the screen, the images must be carefully interpreted by a radiologist who is an expert in this field. S/he will prepare a report and send it to your doctor a few days later. Your doctor will tell you the results and discuss them with you.

## What if I can't keep my MRI appointment?

If you can't keep your appointment, please contact the MRI department straight away.

If you are admitted to hospital before your appointment, please tell the ward staff that you have an MRI appointment booked.

## Where can I get Help?

The staff in the MRI department will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Please ask at the time of your appointment or telephone the department at any time.

MRI dept at:.....

.....Hospital

Tel No:.....

## **Your questions**

You may find it useful to write down your questions when you think of them – a space for this has been left below.

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