

Having an MRI scan

Information for Patients



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Introduction

This leaflet tells you about having an 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 speak to your referring doctor or GP.

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 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 may 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. 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 will be asked to request a radio station 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.

Are there any risks?

There's no evidence that the strong magnetic fields and radio waves used in an MRI cause damage to the human body, and for this reason, they're considered very safe. But if you have metal objects or implants, you may be unsuitable as they may be affected by the powerful magnets – this is the reason a safety questionnaire is completed prior to scanning.

You will be asked to remove any jewelry, hair clips, piercings and external devices that are safe to remove before entering the MRI scanning room. You should also leave keys, other metallic objects, bank cards and mobile phones outside of the room too, as they can be attracted to the magnets in the MRI scanner.

A small number of patients find MRI examinations difficult because of the partly enclosed nature of the scanner, causing claustrophobia but most people can manage it with the support of the radiology staff.

There is a slight risk of an allergic reaction if contrast material is injected. Your radiographer will be available to assist if you experience any symptoms of an allergic reaction.

What do I need to do to prepare for my scan?

Taking tablets and medicines

You should continue to take all your usual medication as normal.

Pregnancy

Patients are asked to contact the Radiology department if there is a possibility of being 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.

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.

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 that you may have. Please take time to read through and complete the questionnaire accurately. If all the answers are 'no' then please bring the completed questionnaire to your appointment. If there are answers that are 'yes', then please contact the department for advice.

Reasonable Adjustments

If you need to reschedule or require any reasonable adjustments to support your appointment, please let us know in advance.

What happens after the scan?

You may eat and drink as normal as soon as the examination is finished.

A 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, please contact our admin team on 01761 422250 or email us at radiology@sulishospital.com