



Having an MRI small bowel scan (MR Enterography)

Information for Patients



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Introduction

This leaflet tells you about having MR Enterography, a test to look at your small bowel - 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 MR Small bowel?

An MR Small Bowel (MR Enterography) is a non-invasive way of looking inside your small bowel and abdomen. The small bowel is the portion of your intestine joining the stomach and duodenum to the large bowel.

An MRI 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. For MR Small Bowel, fluid is drunk prior to the scan to distend the small bowel so that it can be well seen on the MRI images.

What happens during the procedure?

You will be asked to drink about 1.5 litres of liquid steadily over approximately 40 minutes prior to getting on the MRI scanner. This tastes like slightly sugary water, but is not unpleasant. A small tube, called a cannula, will be inserted into one of the veins in your arm.

You will be taken into the MRI Scanning Room and asked to lie down on the moveable scanner table, if possible on your front. A receiving device will be placed around your abdomen and the scanner table will move you into the scanner. MRI scans will be performed to see whether the liquid has passed all the way through the small bowel. Once the fluid has filled the entire small bowel a muscle relaxant may be injected through the cannula into the vein. This will stop the bowel from moving during the scan and give better images of your bowel. The muscle relaxant may make your eyesight blurred and give you a dry mouth, but it soon wears off. However, you should not drive for 30 minutes after the injection.

The MRI scan will then be performed and takes approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. You will be asked to remain still and hold your breath for short periods 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 select a radio station to listen to through the headphones during the scan. You may be given an injection of intravenous contrast medium via the cannula during the scan.

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.

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, causing a projectile risk.

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.

Other problems which might occur are similar to those which can happen with other methods of examining the small bowel. These include nausea or abdominal discomfort. The liquid you drink may cause some short-lived diarrhoea.

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. If you are diabetic using insulin, please contact the Radiology department for advice.

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

It is very important for the stomach and small bowel to be empty before the test is performed so that the small bowel can be clearly seen. You will be given a leaflet explaining this bowel preparation in more detail. The leaflet gives dietary instructions about what you should and should not eat or drink before your test. Sometimes a mild laxative is prescribed to clear the small bowel prior to the test. It is very important that you follow the instructions you are given.

If you are lactose intolerant, please contact the department before your scan as we may not be able to proceed with the examination.

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?

The liquid you drink may cause some short lived diarrhoea, so you may wish to spend a short time in the department near to a toilet before you go home. 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