

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)



Patient Information

What is an MRI scan?

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a method of looking inside the body without using surgery or xrays. The MRI scanner is a large doughnut shaped magnet open at both ends. It uses a strong magnetic field, radio waves and a computer to produce clear pictures of the human body. This technology is important because MRI scans can demonstrate to your doctor the difference between healthy and diseased tissue.

Note, there are certain patients on whom we cannot perform the test. Prior to the MRI examination you will be asked to complete a questionnaire to determine its appropriateness.

If you are a nursing mother you will need to contact the MRI unit 2 days prior to your appointment.

What preparation is required?

You will be asked to change into a gown. The following items cannot be taken into the scan room because of the strong magnetic field (a locker is available for any valuables): watches, scissors, removable jewellery, shoes, pens, pencils, wallet, coins, credit cards, keys, dentures, wigs, hairclips, mobile phones, clothing with metal attachments, e.g. bra, jeans or pants with a zip, etc.

If you are having a head scan do not wear eye makeup.

For head, spine, bone and joint MRIs no specific preparation is required.

For abdomen MRIs a 6 hour fast prior to the procedure is required.

Instructions for diabetics having abdominal scans

Please inform booking staff if you are a diabetic and they will advise you of any special arrangements.

Please inform booking staff if you have renal function impairment or are on dialysis.

What documentation is required?

Bring your referral and any relevant previous MRI images for comparison.

Also bring your Medicare card, Pension or Healthcare card or Veteran's Affairs card details if applicable.

What you need to tell us prior to your appointment?

At the time of arranging your appointment, please advise us if you are pregnant or could be pregnant. MRI is usually avoided in the first trimester of pregnancy unless the diagnosis cannot wait and your doctor considers the MRI to be the best investigation.

It is also important that you tell us if you answer yes to any of the following conditions/circumstances:

- Metal implants of any kind, e.g. joint replacements
- Pacemaker or neurostimulator implant
- Have worked with metal
- Renal impairment
- Significant claustrophobia
- Adverse reaction to a contrast injection given for a previous MRI scan.

What will happen during the examination?

The examination will not hurt. You will feel nothing from it either during or after the test. You will hear tapping noises. These can sometimes be quite loud, so you will be provided with ear plugs or earphones.

All you have to do is relax and keep absolutely still. The radiographer will position you on a padded table (usually on your back) and this will slowly be moved into the scanner.

The scanner is air-conditioned and well lit. You will be able to hear and talk to the radiographer via an intercom system at all times.

A friend or family member may safely accompany you in the scan room if you wish. You have a choice of recorded music to listen to during the examination. Please feel free to bring along your favourite CD to listen to.

Your appointment details

Date

Time

Location

Most scans do not involve any medication. Some patients will be given a small injection into a vein to improve information on the images. Do not be concerned if you are given an injection, as with some examinations this is routine procedure.

How long will the examination take?

MRI examinations usually take up to 30 minutes to complete. This time is broken into a series of scans each of 5 minutes on average.

What can you expect after your examination?

There should be no ill effects after the examination.

It is important to note that the MRI scan is not a treatment. It is a test to diagnose the cause of your illness or symptoms.

Are there any risks?

MRI does not utilise ionising radiation which is used in x-ray and CT scanning. The magnetic field and radio frequency pulses used in clinical MRI are believed not to produce any long term effects.

However, due to limited research in the area of pregnancy and MRI exposure, it may be inadvisable to undergo MRI during pregnancy. Please advise the MRI staff if you are or suspect you are pregnant.

If Gadolinium is required this has a tiny risk of allergic reaction - that can range from hives to shortness of breath and anaphylaxis. Such a reaction is extremely rare, in the order of 1:200,000.

Also, if you have severe renal failure or are on dialysis please tell the radiographers as Gadolinium can affect renal function in rare cases in such patients.

What happens with the images and reports?

The images will be reviewed by the Radiologist who will forward the images and a report to your referring doctor. This can take 1 to 2 working days. Your doctor will then discuss the results with you.

We store digital copies of all studies and reports on our secure patient information system for comparison with any future examinations.

