

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having an MRI scan. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what you can expect when you come to the department. If you have any further questions, please speak to the Radiographer caring for you.

What is an MRI scan?

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is an imaging tool that uses a powerful magnet to scan your body. The MRI scan will help in the diagnosis and treatment of your health condition. There is no use of radiation or X-rays. The MRI scanner is a tube which is open at both ends, and you can be seen at all times by the Radiographer.

What happens during an MRI scan?

You will be asked to lie down on a motorised bed which then moves slowly into the opening of the scanner. Typically, you will lie down head first, but where possible, we can position you feet first if you would prefer. We will provide you with blankets and cushions to make you as comfortable as possible.

You will be given a contact buzzer to hold which you can use if you experience any problems during your scan.

You will also be given some earplugs and headphones to wear. During the scan, you will hear loud clicking, knocking and buzzing sounds which change throughout the scan. These are perfectly normal and are a sign that the scanner is working well.

You will need to lie very still during the scan to avoid blurring the images. You may even be asked to hold your breath for a moment. The Radiographer will leave the room for the scan, but you will be able to talk to them through an intercom, and they will be watching you through a glass window.

Sometimes, we may need to give you an injection of contrast dye during your scan. We have a separate information leaflet about contrast dye which we will share with you if it applies to your scan.

When the scan is complete, and the Radiographer has checked over your images for quality, you will be able to get down from the scanner bed and leave. While the Radiographer can reassure you that the appropriate images have been obtained, they will usually not be able to give you an idea of the results at that time.

How long will it take?

This depends on which part of your body is being scanned, but you can typically expect to be in the scanner for between 15 and 60 minutes. You should plan to be in the department for around 1 hour unless we have told you otherwise.

Why should I have an MRI scan?

An MRI scan can help your doctor to find the cause of your problem and decide on the best treatment options for you. Your doctor will have performed an analysis of the risks and the benefits of having the scan before referring you.

What if I am claustrophobic?

If you are claustrophobic, we recommend you contact us to discuss your concerns. You may also want to talk with your referring doctor or your GP who may prescribe medication to help you relax. We cannot prescribe this medication for you in the MRI department.

Are there any alternatives?

Your doctor has referred you for an MRI scan as they feel that this is the best option for you. Often, they will have referred to 'best practice' guidelines when deciding on the most appropriate imaging test to use. Alternatives may be available but may not provide the same level of information. If you would prefer not to have an MRI scan, you should discuss this with your doctor.

How can I prepare for the scan?

There is very little preparation required for standard MRI scans.

If you are taking any medicines, please continue to take these as usual unless you have been told otherwise by your doctor. It would also be advisable to arrive well hydrated as this will help if we need to do an injection of contrast dye.

If you need to bring your children with you, please bring along an adult who can supervise them while your scan is underway. We are unable to offer childcare facilities.

Please tell us if you have a cardiac pacemaker or any other cardiac device, or if you have had surgery within the previous six weeks. This may affect how we perform your scan and may require us to reschedule your scan.

If you are or think you may be pregnant, please also tell us before your appointment.

What do I need to wear?

Metal fastenings like zips, poppers and hooks and eyes will affect the scan, so we may ask you to change into a hospital gown. Hairbands, grips, earrings, hearing aids and metallic dentures will also need to be removed. Dental fillings will not affect the scan.

Will I feel any pain?

You should not feel any pain or any unpleasant sensations during your scan. We will do our best to make you as comfortable as possible while lying down. If you find it uncomfortable to lie still, then please tell the Radiographer.

What are the risks?

MRI scans are not for everyone as the strong magnetic field associated with the scanner may interfere with certain medical implants and pose a potential safety risk if not managed appropriately. The radiographers will perform safety screening checks with you before your scan using a safety questionnaire which everyone entering the scanning room must complete.

Otherwise, there are no known risks of having an MRI scan.

Sometimes, we may need to give you an injection of contrast dye during your scan. We have a separate information leaflet about contrast dye which we will share with you if it applies to your scan which explains the benefits and risks of MRI contrast agents.

What happens after the scan?

In most cases, as soon as the scan is finished, you can go home. If you have had a contrast dye injection, we may ask you to wait for 10-15 minutes before you leave the department. This is to ensure that there is no sign of an allergic reaction to the contrast dye. You can eat and drink as normal and resume your usual activities straight after the scan.

The results will not be given to you immediately. Your MRI pictures will be studied by a radiologist, and the results will be sent to the doctor who referred you within 24 hours. They will discuss the results with you and any treatment you may need.

Contact Us

If you have any questions or concerns about having an MRI scan, please contact the MRI department at the Queen Square Imaging Centre on **020 7833 2513**, Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm.

If you need this document translated into a different format (e.g. large print), please contact us directly and we will try our best to meet your needs.