

MRI: Abdomen Scan

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how an MRI scan of the abdomen works, how to prepare, what to expect during the scan, and how to get your results.

What is an MRI scan?

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a way to take pictures of your internal organs and tissues. It uses radio waves and a strong magnet to provide clear and detailed pictures. Even different types of tissue within the same organ are easily seen in an MRI image.

MRI will help your healthcare provider decide which treatment is best for your health condition.

What is an abdomen scan?

An MRI scan of the *abdomen* (belly) is often used to help diagnose a health issue. It usually involves taking at least 4 sets of images. Each set will show a different area of your abdomen. It takes 14 seconds to 4 minutes to take each set.

For Your Safety

Health Review

We need to know about certain **health conditions** before your MRI scan. Please tell us if you:

- Have any problems with your liver or kidneys
- Are on dialysis
- Need a liver or kidney transplant
- Have allergies to any drugs or *contrast* (X-ray dye)
- Have had any surgeries



An MRI image of the abdomen.

Screening for Metal

If you have any metal on or in your body, an MRI can harm you.

The strong MRI magnet will pull on any *ferromagnetic* object, such as iron and some other metals.

This is why we need to know if you have any metal in or on your body before we give you an MRI scan. Even small amounts of metal that will not harm your body can ruin the MRI image.

Please tell our staff if you have:

- Aneurysm clips, a heart pacemaker (or artificial heart valve), an implanted port, an infusion catheter (such as Port-o-cath, Infusaport, or Lifeport), an intrauterine device (IUD), any metal plates, clips, pins, screws, or surgical staples, a prosthetic hip, or any implanted metal object in your body
 - Most times, surgical staples, clips, plates, pins, and screws are not a risk if they have been in place for more than 4 to 6 weeks. If needed, we may do an X-ray to check for metal.
- Tattoos or permanent eyeliner
- Medicine patches
- A bullet or shrapnel in your body
- Ever worked with metal

How do I prepare?

- Please talk with your referring provider if you have any concerns about managing pain or anxiety during your MRI scan.
- *Women:* Tell your provider if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, or if there is any chance you could be pregnant.
- If you take iron medicines or supplements, you must stop taking them 48 hours before your scan. Please talk with the provider who prescribed them if you have concerns.
- If your scan is in the **morning**:
 - The evening before your scan, have a light dinner, such as eggs or a sandwich.
 - Do **not** eat breakfast on the morning of your scan.
- If your scan is in the **afternoon**:
 - On the morning of your scan, have a light breakfast, such as an egg and toast, or cereal.
 - Do **not** eat lunch.

On the Day of Your Scan

- **Remove any items that might contain metal.** These include:
 - Makeup and nail polish
 - Hairpins

- Jewelry
- Glasses, hearing aids, and any removable dental work
- Take your medicines as usual.
- **Starting 4 hours before your scan:** Do **not** eat any solid food.
- It is OK to drink liquids that do not contain caffeine, milk, or chocolate up to 1 hour before your scan.
- **Starting 1 hour before your scan:** Do **not** eat or drink anything.
- We will ask you to change into a hospital gown. We will give you a gown when you arrive in the MRI department.
- If you have an insulin pump or a patch that delivers any type of drug, we will ask you to remove it.
- *Women:* Before the scan begins, tell your technologist if there is any chance you could be pregnant.

What happens during the scan?

- You will lie on a sliding table and a device called a *surface coil* will be placed around your belly.
- We may give you medicine to calm your bowels for a short time. This helps us get the clearest pictures.
- The technologist will slide the table inside the MRI unit and then leave the room to take the MRI pictures. You will be able to talk with the technologist at any time through an intercom.
- We will ask you to hold very still as each picture is taken. We may also ask to hold your breath for some of the pictures.
- The scan usually takes 20 to 45 minutes.
- Sometimes, an injection of a *contrast* is used to make certain tissues or blood vessels easier to see. If you need this injection:
 - Your doctor will talk with you about it before your scan.
 - *Women:* Tell your doctor if there is any chance you could be pregnant.
 - You will receive the injection about halfway through the scan. It will be injected through a small needle and an *intravenous* (IV) line in your arm or hand vein.
 - If your doctor has asked for *delayed enhancement images*, we will take more images 20 minutes after your contrast injection. This will add about 5 to 10 minutes to the length of the scan.

- After the scan, we will ask you to wait while we check the images for quality. If needed, we will take more pictures.
- When your scan is over, we will remove the surface coil.

What will I feel during the scan?

- MRI does not cause pain.
- Some patients may feel confined or uneasy (*claustrophobic*) when they are inside the MRI unit. Please tell the doctor who referred you for the MRI if you are claustrophobic. You may receive medicine to help you relax.
- You may feel warmth in the area where the pictures are taken. This is normal. If it bothers you, please tell the technologist.
- You will hear loud tapping or knocking noises during the scan. We will provide earplugs and headphones with music to help block some of these sounds.
- If a contrast injection is needed, you may feel discomfort or coolness at the injection site.

After the Scan

- Drink plenty of fluids the rest of the day to help flush the contrast out of your body. Try to drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid.
- **If you received a medicine to slow your bowels before your scan:** Do **not** drive for 4 hours after your scan. To get home, you can have someone drive you; you can take a bus, taxi, or shuttle; or you can walk.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- UWMC - Montlake Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- Harborview Imaging Services: 206.744.3105
- UWMC - Northwest Imaging Services: 206.668.2061

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in MRI will review and interpret your MRI images. The radiologist will not talk with you about the results, but will send a report to your primary care or referring provider. This provider will give you the results.

You and your provider will then decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

You may also read your results on your MyChart page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call 206.598.6206.