

MRI: Magnetic Resonance Imaging

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains magnetic resonance imaging, how to prepare for the scan, what to expect, 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.

How does the scan work?

An MRI scan usually involves taking at least 5 sets of pictures. Each set will show a cross-section of the body part that is scanned. It takes 2 to 15 minutes to take each set.

For Your Safety

Health Review

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

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

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.



You will lie on a sliding table for your scan. An MRI technologist will help you get into position.

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 MRI 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 during MRI 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
- Tooth fillings or braces
 - Dental work is not usually affected by the MRI, but fillings and braces may distort pictures of the face or brain.

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.

On the Day of Your Scan

- **Remove anything that might contain metal.** This includes:
 - Makeup and nail polish
 - Hairpins
 - Jewelry
 - Glasses, hearing aids, and any removable dental work
- You must change into a hospital gown before your scan. 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, tell the technologist if there is any chance you could be pregnant.

What happens during the scan?

- You will lie on a sliding table. The technologist will help you get into position.
- The technologist will slide the table inside the MRI unit and then leave the room to take the MRI pictures.
- You can talk with the technologist at any time using an intercom.
- The entire scan usually takes 15 to 45 minutes. Some studies may take longer.
- We will ask you to stay very still while the MRI pictures are taken to avoid blurring the images. You will need to hold still for only a few seconds to a few minutes at a time.
- Sometimes an injection of *contrast* (dye) is given halfway through the scan to make some tissues or blood vessels easier to see. If you have contrast, it will be injected through an *intravenous* (IV) line in an arm or hand vein.
- After the scan, you will be asked to wait until the pictures are checked for quality. More pictures will be taken if needed.

What will I feel during the MRI 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, tell the technologist.
- If a contrast injection is needed, you may feel discomfort or coolness at the injection site.
- 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.

After the Scan

If you received IV contrast: Drink plenty of fluids the rest of the day. This will help flush the contrast out of your body. Try to drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid.

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.

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