

Patient information factsheet

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) spine scan

We have given you this factsheet because you have an appointment for an MRI scan. It explains what an MRI scan is and what to expect at your appointment. Your appointment letter will also give you details of your appointment date and other useful information. Please check the date and let us know if you will not be able to attend, so that another appointment can be arranged for you. We hope this factsheet will help to answer your questions about the scan and prepare you for your appointment.

What is an MRI scan?

MRI is a type of scan that uses strong magnetic fields and radio waves to produce detailed images of the inside of the body. It is a painless and safe procedure. The results of an MRI scan can be used to help diagnose conditions, plan treatments and assess how effective previous treatment has been.

Preparing for your MRI spine scan

We will send you a safety questionnaire with your appointment letter. Please fill this out and bring it with you to your appointment.

Your scan will take between 20 to 40 minutes, depending on how much of your spine is being imaged.

At the appointment

On the day of your appointment, please check in at our reception using the self-service monitors. Please arrive 15 minutes before your appointment time. We will be available to provide assistance if required.

We will greet you and then privately go through your completed safety questionnaire.

We will ask you to change into a hospital gown and put all of your belongings into a locker before your scan. You will need to remove all jewellery, piercings, drug patches, metallic denture plates and hearing aids. Please feel free to bring a dressing gown with you.

During the scan

An MRI scanner is a short cylinder that is open at both ends. You will enter the scanner head-first, lying on your back on the motorised bed. We will try to make you as comfortable as possible with the use of pads and supports. We will position you in the centre of the scanning bed. You will need to lie very still throughout the duration of the scan to achieve the best quality imaging.

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We will operate the MRI scanner using a computer in a separate room. You will be able to communicate with the radiographer between scans via a built-in microphone system.

During the scan you may feel your body temperature increase and you may experience tingling in your hands and feet. These are normal sensations. Please tell us if you feel uncomfortable at any point. We will give you an emergency buzzer to hold during the scan.

At certain times during the scan, the scanner will make loud tapping noises. This is the electric current in the scanner coils being turned on and off. We will give you ear plugs to protect your hearing from the noise. You will also have the option to listen to music (of your choice) through headphones during the scan.

Your results

The radiographer will review your images to check the quality of the scan images. We will then discuss your results with you at your next follow-up appointment.

MRI safety information

Please read the information below carefully.

Implants and devices

Due to the powerful magnetic field created by the scanner, even when not in use, it may not be safe for some people with implants and devices to have an MRI scan. We will need to investigate the safety of these before your appointment.

You must contact us if:

- you have a cardiac pacemaker or defibrillator
- you have had a heart valve replacement
- you have ever had surgery on your head
- you have ever had metal in your eyes from welding or metal-work accidents (an eye x-ray may be required before your scan)
- you have any metallic or electronic implants
- you have had any surgery within the past six weeks
- you have any auditory implants (such as cochlear implants)
- you have ever swallowed a capsule camera

If you do not let us know in advance, we may have to postpone your scan.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

MRI scans are not known to affect babies during pregnancy, but as a precaution we advise against having a scan in the first trimester of pregnancy. If you are breastfeeding and we give you a contrast dye injection, we advise that you do not breastfeed for 24 hours afterwards. You should express and discard breast milk during this time.

If you know or think you might be pregnant, or are currently breastfeeding, you should telephone us for advice as soon as you receive your appointment letter.

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Bringing someone with you for support

If you wish to have someone in the scanner room with you for support, they will need to complete a safety questionnaire and comply with safety regulations.

We do not have crèche facilities, so if you are attending with young children, you will need to make arrangements for their supervision during your scan.

Further information

We have enclosed a map and information about how to get to us. If you are arriving by car, please remember that our car parks can get very busy, so it's a good idea to allow plenty of time to find a space. You may wish to consider getting a lift or coming by public transport.

If you have a medical condition that means you need help getting to hospital, please contact your GP surgery so they can arrange transportation for you.

Contact us

If you have any concerns or would like further information, you can contact us on **023 8120 6588** from 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. If you are unsure why you need to have this scan, please speak to the doctor who referred you.

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/mri-scan

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone **023 8120 4688** for help.