

Patient information factsheet

Fetal magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan

We have given you this factsheet because you have been referred for a fetal magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan (a scan of your baby in the womb).

This factsheet explains what a fetal MRI scan is, what it involves and how to prepare for it. It aims to support the discussions you will have with our fetal medicine team. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

What is a fetal 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. A fetal MRI scan is a special type of MRI scan which takes detailed images of a baby's brain while they are in the womb. It is a safe and painless procedure for both you and your baby.

Why have I been referred for a fetal MRI scan?

The purpose of a fetal MRI scan is to:

- compliment the images seen on your ultrasound scan (a procedure that uses high-frequency sound waves to create an image of your baby while they are inside your womb)
- provide information about the way your baby's brain is forming and developing (other parts of your baby's body can also be seen in the images taken, but only the images of the brain are looked at in detail)

A member of the fetal medicine team will have explained why they have referred you for this scan.

When will I have the scan?

Fetal MRI scans are only performed from 22 weeks of pregnancy. The exact timing of your scan will vary depending on when the concerns about your baby's brain development were identified.

It is important to note that a baby's brain changes and develops as they grow in the womb. This means we are unable to identify all of the possible concerns which may occur with your baby's brain development as some do not become apparent until much later in pregnancy. We will discuss this with you in more detail at your follow-up appointment with us.

Are there any risks?

As with all forms of medical scanning, fetal MRI scans are not able to pick up all potential problems.

Where will the scan take place?

The fetal MRI scan will take place at Southampton General Hospital. A member of the MRI team will phone you with information about the date and time of your scan and let you know where to come on the day.

Can I bring someone with me?

You are welcome to bring someone with you to your appointment for support. However, please note that the person accompanying you will not be able to come into the scan room with you. The MRI team will advise them where they can wait while you have your scan.

Please do not bring children with you to your appointment as there are no childcare facilities in the MRI department and they cannot stay with you during your scan.

How should I prepare for the scan?

- Do not eat or drink anything for **one hour** before your scan.
- Avoid foods and drinks containing caffeine (for example, tea, coffee, chocolate and certain fizzy drinks) on the day of your scan.

What will happen before the scan?

When you arrive, a member of the MRI team will explain what will happen during the scan and complete a safety checklist with you. If you are happy to go ahead with the scan, the MRI team will then ask you to sign a consent form.

It is very important to inform the MRI team if you have, or have had, any of the following:

- a cardiac pacemaker or defibrillator
- a heart valve replacement
- surgery on your head
- metal in your eyes from welding or metal-work accidents (an eye x-ray may be needed before your scan)
- metallic or electronic implants
- surgery within the past six weeks
- auditory implants (for example, a cochlear implant)
- a procedure that involved swallowing a capsule camera
- hormone patches
- a glucose monitor and/or insulin pump

You will need to remove all jewellery, magnetic body piercings, watches, drug patches, metallic denture plates and hearing aids before the scan. You may also wish to remove any clips and/or fastenings from your hair (this can make lying down for the scan more comfortable).

We will also ask you to change into a hospital gown. If you would prefer to wear your own underwear underneath the gown, it must not contain any metal (for example, wear a sports bra without any underwires or metal fasteners).

Please make sure you empty your bladder before you go into the scan room.

What will happen during the scan?

The MRI scanner is a cylinder that is open at both ends (similar to a tunnel).

The radiographer (healthcare professional performing the scan) will ask you to lie down on a motorised bed. Depending on how many weeks pregnant you are, we may ask you to lie either on your back or side. We will try to make you as comfortable as possible, using pads and cushions as needed. Once you are in the correct position, we will move the bed so that you enter the scanner feet first.

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We will operate the MRI scanner using a computer in a separate room. However, we will still be able to see you throughout the scan and we will give you a call button to press should you feel uncomfortable or need to speak to us at any point.



During the scan, you will hear a rhythmic tapping sound which may become quite loud. This is normal. We will give you headphones or earplugs to wear to help protect your ears from the noise. You will have the option to listen to music through these headphones (many people find this helps to relax them). Please discuss your choice of music with the radiographer.

It is important that you lie still during the scan so that the images are not blurred. Your baby may move when they first hear the noise of the scanner, but most babies settle again as the noise is repetitive.

How long will the scan take?

The fetal MRI scan will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

What will happen after the scan?

You will be able to return to your usual daily activities immediately after the fetal MRI scan is complete.

When will I receive the results?

We will not be able to give you any results on the day of your scan as the images will need to be sent to a team of neuroradiologists (doctors specialising in diagnosis and treatment of conditions affecting the brain) to review. This usually takes around one week but can sometimes take longer. A member of our fetal medicine team will call you to arrange a follow-up appointment to discuss the MRI findings with you. Please note that a member of the paediatric neurology team will often join us for this follow-up appointment.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Fetal medicine team

Telephone: **023 8120 6025** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

For queries about the date or time of your fetal MRI scan, please contact the MRI team using the details below:

MRI main reception

Telephone: **023 8120 6588** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 9pm and weekends, 9am to 4pm)

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Useful links

Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC)

A national charity helping parents and healthcare professionals through antenatal screening and its consequences.

Helpline: **020 7713 7486**

Website: www.arc-uk.org

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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