

Patient information factsheet

Having a myelogram

We have written this factsheet to give you information about having a myelogram. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of your healthcare team or contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

What is a myelogram?

A myelogram is an x-ray examination of the spinal cord, spinal canal (fluid-filled space surrounding the spinal cord) and nerve roots (part of the nerve which comes from the spinal cord). An x-ray is a quick and painless procedure that uses radiation to produce an image of the inside of the body.

A myelogram involves having an injection of contrast medium into the spinal canal. Contrast medium shows up clearly on x-ray images and helps to show detail. A number of x-rays are then taken of the spine in different positions.

Most people will have a CT scan after the myelogram, while the contrast medium is still present in their spinal canal. The images from this scan help to outline the internal structures more clearly.

Why do I need a myelogram?

The purpose of a myelogram is to assess the spinal cord and/or nerve roots for suspected compression. Pressure on these delicate structures can cause pain or other symptoms. A myelogram is performed when precise detail about the spinal cord is needed to make a definitive diagnosis.

A myelogram is usually performed after other imaging studies, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or CT scans, have failed to provide enough information to make a diagnosis. However, it is sometimes recommended as an alternative for people who cannot have an MRI scan (for example, people who have a pacemaker or other implanted metallic device).

How should I prepare for the procedure?

Eating and drinking

You can eat and drink as normal on the day of the procedure. We recommend eating a light meal and drinking plenty of fluids before you come into the hospital, so you are well hydrated.

Medication

Some people may need to stop taking certain medications before the procedure. We will let you know in advance if you need to stop taking any medication.

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Please contact our neuro interventional radiology office on **023 8120 8400** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) as soon as you receive your appointment letter if you are taking:

- warfarin
- any other anticoagulant (blood-thinning) medication

These medications can increase your risk of bleeding during the procedure so it is important that we discuss this in advance with the doctor who requested you have the procedure.

Pregnancy

If you are pregnant, trying to get pregnant, or if you think there is a chance that you might be pregnant, please contact our neuro interventional radiology office as soon as you receive your appointment letter.

Travel arrangements

It is important that you make arrangements for a responsible adult to collect you from the day unit and drive you home after the procedure. This is so that you have someone with you if you feel unwell after you leave hospital.

Who will perform the procedure?

The procedure will be performed by a radiologist (a specialist doctor who is trained to read and interpret medical images, using a wide range of imaging techniques).

Where will the procedure be performed?

The procedure will be performed in the neuro angiography suite within the radiology department. Please see your appointment letter for more details.

What will happen before the procedure?

When you arrive at the hospital, we will admit you to the day unit and ask you to change into a hospital gown. We may then take a blood sample to check that your blood clotting and kidney functions are normal. It can take up to two hours to receive the result of this blood test.

While you are waiting on the unit, we will:

- ask you about your general medical history (including if you have any allergies)
- explain the procedure to you in detail (including the benefits and risks)
- answer any questions you may have

If you are happy to go ahead with the procedure, we will then ask you to sign a consent form.

What will happen during the procedure?

We will ask you to lie on the x-ray table, usually on your left-hand side with your knees bent up and your head tucked in.

We will then look at your spine under x-ray so that we can find the best location to position the needle.

We will then clean the skin on your lower back with antiseptic before numbing the area with a local anaesthetic injection. This may feel slightly uncomfortable before going numb.

Once the area is numb, we will insert a needle into your spinal canal. At this point, we may withdraw a small amount of cerebrospinal fluid (clear fluid that surrounds the spinal cord and brain) for testing. We will send this sample to the laboratory for analysis.

We will then inject some contrast medium into your spinal canal and take a number of x-rays of your spine. To help the contrast medium reach different levels in your spinal canal, we may ask you to move into different positions or we may move the x-ray table (for example, tilting the table so you are positioned head up or head down). We will tilt the table slowly and use rests and supports to keep you from sliding out of position.

After the myelogram is complete, we will usually perform a CT scan. We will transfer you to the CT scanner on a trolley.

How long will it take?

A myelogram usually takes around 45 to 60 minutes. Having a CT scan after the myelogram will add approximately a further 20 minutes to the examination. You should expect to be in the hospital for three to four hours in total to allow for preparation and recovery time.

What will happen after the procedure?

We will take you back to the day unit after your procedure. You will need to stay on the day unit for at least one hour after your procedure so that we can monitor your recovery.

While you are recovering from the procedure, you should:

- keep your head slightly elevated (raised)
- drink plenty of water to help flush the contrast medium from your body (this will also help to prevent headaches)

You can resume taking your normal medications after the procedure.

You should avoid strenuous physical activity, especially any activities which involve bending over, for one or two days after the procedure.

You can wash or shower as normal after the procedure.

Are there any risks or complications?

A myelogram is generally a safe procedure, but as with any medical procedure there are possible risks.

Common side effects include:

- **Headaches, which may be relieved by flat bed rest and/or medication**
Some people experience a headache which begins several hours to several days after the examination. The headache is usually mild and will get better with rest and increased fluids. In some instances, the headache may be more severe and medication or other measures may be needed for relief. If this occurs, contact your general practitioner (GP) for advice.
- **An increase in leg and back pain (if it was present before the myelogram)**
This will only last a short time and can be relieved by taking pain relief medication, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (remember to always read the information included in the pack before taking any medication).

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Extremely rare complications include:

- an allergic reaction to the contrast medium (this is usually an immediate reaction which the medical team caring for you will treat accordingly)
- an infection at the injection site and around the spinal cord
- leakage of spinal fluid

When should I seek urgent medical help?

Contact your GP or go to your nearest emergency department immediately if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- a severe headache which is not relieved by over-the-counter medication, or which lasts longer than 24 hours
- drowsiness
- a fever (a temperature of 38°C or above)
- new symptoms such as weakness or numbness in your arms or legs
- difficulty passing urine or moving your bowels
- dizziness
- discharge of blood or fluid from the injection site in your back

When will I receive the results?

The radiologist will examine the images and send a report with their findings to the doctor who requested you have the myelogram. Your doctor will discuss your results with you at your next outpatient follow-up appointment.

Contact us

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

Neuro interventional radiology office

Telephone: **023 8120 8400** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Cross-sectional imaging department

Telephone: **023 8120 6588** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

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

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