

What is a Magnetic Resonance Image (MRI) Scan?

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) uses magnetic energy and radio waves to produce detailed images of the inside of the human body. It does this by 'slicing' through the area being scanned, one small section at a time, to gradually build a 3-D picture, just as slices of bread make a complete loaf when put together. Doctors use MRI to help diagnose medical conditions and disorders. It does not involve radiation and nothing has to be inserted into your body.

What is contrast?

Intravenous (IV) contrast is a dye used in some MRI examinations to allow further clarification of structures and tissues to allow for an accurate diagnosis. We use the most advanced form of contrast available called "non-ionic" contrast which has far fewer side effects and reactions.

Patients who have poor kidney function (renal impairment) will not be given contrast so as not to worsen the condition. The dye will only be given once you give your consent (permission) to do so, which will need to be formally documented on the information sheet with your signature. If it is needed you will be advised of any further preparation before your appointment.

How long does a MRI scan take?

Once you are in the room the examination will take approximately 15 – 45 minutes, sometimes longer depending on the area that needs to be examined.

Who conducts my MRI scan?

A trained radiographer who is accredited with the Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia (MRBPA) will conduct your scan.

Is there any preparation?

When you arrive, a member of staff will complete a safety checklist with you to make sure that you can be scanned, and will answer any questions that you may have. There is usually no need for any special preparation before your scan. On the day of your scan you will probably be able to eat and drink as normal and take any medicine you have been prescribed - if not, we will tell you when you book your appointment. You will need to remove all metal objects such as zips, jewellery, hair grips and so on before entering the scan room because of the powerful magnet that is used to scan. Credit cards are also affected by the magnet - you can leave these and other valuables in the location provided. Please do not wear mascara if you are having a scan of your head or eyes as it contains fine metallic particles which affect the pictures.

What if I'm on medication?

You must advise your referring doctor and the radiologist if you are on any medication. The use of medications may need to be reviewed.

What if I'm pregnant?

If you are pregnant, or it is possible that you may be pregnant, then a MRI scan is usually not performed unless it is an absolute medical necessity to do so. It is possible that an ultrasound scan may provide similar information and therefore be used as a substitute. Please inform our clinic if this situation applies to you.

Breast feeding mothers are advised to stop breast feeding for 24hrs if contrast is used.

When do I get the results?

The results of your MRI scan can take up to 1 day to be finalised. You will be advised when to pick up your images and report for your follow up with your doctor.

What should I wear?

We will ask you to change into a gown if you are wearing clothes that contain metal.

You may prefer to arrive for your scan in clothes which do not contain metal, for example you could wear a zipless tracksuit or an elasticated skirt.

What should I expect?

The Radiographer will position you on a comfortable bed, which slides into the scanner. You will be asked to keep still while we scan you and produce your images. MRI is a completely harmless procedure, but the scanner is very noisy when it is taking pictures so we will provide you with ear protection. We will be able to play music during your scan to try minimising the noise.

There are no after-effects from your scan so you can carry on with all your normal activities (driving, for example) straight away.

Is it safe?

MRI is considered to be a very safe procedure with no known side effects. However, because magnetic energy is used in the procedure, the scanner does attract metal objects, particularly those containing iron. For this reason you should contact the MRI unit before your appointment if you have any metallic implants or devices such as:

- Artificial heart valves
- Artificial limbs
- Pins and plates in your joints
- Dental work
- Implanted electronic devices such as a pacemaker

You should also contact us if you have ever had any metal fragments in your eyes.

What documents do I need?

Please bring with you your referral and any prior scans and reports as this will assist the radiologist in assessing your condition.

How do I make an appointment?

You can call our clinic directly on 02 4722 4700 to book an appointment.

