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Having a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan

Imaging

A guide for patients and carers

Contents

What is an MRI scanner?.....	1
Why do I need an MRI scan?.....	1
Are there any risks?	2
What is the preparation for an MRI scan?	2
What will happen during the scan?.....	4
When will I get the results?	5

Your doctor has arranged for you to have a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust.

This leaflet will explain the following:

- What is an MRI scanner?
- Why do I need an MRI scan?
- Are there any risks?
- What is the preparation for an MRI scan?
- What will happen during the scan?
- When will I get the results?



What is an MRI scanner?

An MRI scanner is a tunnel-shaped machine about five feet long, open at both ends. You will lie on a couch that slides into the scanner. It uses a strong magnetic field and radio waves together with an advanced computer system to build up a series of images, each one showing a thin slice of the area being examined.

The radiographers who perform your scan are highly experienced, trained professionals who specialise in MRI.

Why do I need an MRI scan?

An MRI scan helps your doctor to assess your condition. Compared to x-rays, ultrasound or Computed Tomography (CT) scanning, MRI shows some parts of the body and certain diseases more clearly.



Are there any risks?

As far as is known, this is an extremely safe procedure. It does not involve the use of x-rays. However, since the scanner uses a powerful magnetic field, it is important that the radiographers are aware of any metal within your body from operations or injuries. Please refer to your appointment letter for advice on when to telephone the department before your appointment if you think there may be a reason why you cannot have an MRI scan.

Ladies, before carrying out the scan, it is very important that we know if you are breastfeeding or are (or think you may be) pregnant. If this is the case, please contact us in advance as it may be necessary to delay your appointment.

What is the preparation for an MRI scan?

Unless you are told otherwise, you may drive, take medicines and eat and drink as normal on the day of your scan.

Some people occasionally find the scanner makes them feel claustrophobic. If you think this may happen to you, please telephone the department for advice as soon as you receive your appointment.

You may bring a friend or relative with you. Under certain circumstances they may sit with you during the scan.

You may bring a CD to listen to during the scan. Otherwise we can offer a choice of digital radio stations. However, this may not be possible with some types of scan.



On arrival, a member of staff will complete a safety checklist with you.

You may be asked to change into a hospital gown. You will be asked to remove any jewellery (except your wedding ring), cash, keys, credit cards and watches etc, and put them in a locker outside the scanner. If you wear a hearing aid or metal denture, you will be asked to remove these just before you enter the scanner room. This is because anything containing metal may interfere with the magnetic field of the MRI scanner.



What will happen during the scan?

The radiographer will explain what is happening at all times.

You will be taken into the scanner room and made comfortable lying on the couch. A special 'receiving device', which acts like an aerial, is placed on, under or around the area being imaged. This detects the tiny radio signals emitted from your body during the scans.

During scanning, there is a loud knocking noise so you will be given headphones or earplugs to wear.

You will be given a call buzzer to hold. This can be used should you need to speak to the radiographer during a scan.

When you are comfortable, the couch moves so you are lying within the scanner. Patients normally remain comfortable during the scan and sometimes even fall asleep briefly! The radiographer will be watching you all the time from the control room next to the scanner. You will be able to talk to them through the intercom. If you feel uncomfortable or worried at any time, do mention it immediately to the radiographer.

For some body areas, an injection of a fluid ('contrast agent') is required. This helps produce more detailed imaging. It is given through a small needle into a vein in the arm.

The length of time you are in the scanner varies depending on the body area being imaged. A brain scan may take 30 minutes, a spine scan 40 minutes and some scans can take up to an hour.



There are usually no side-effects from the scan. Afterwards, you may drive home, eat and drink as normal, and return to work as necessary.

If you have had an injection during the scan, it is a good idea to drink plenty of water over the next few hours to flush the fluid out of your system.

When will I get the results?

After you leave the department, our specialist doctor (a radiologist) will examine the images and write a report. This report is sent to your consultant normally within 7 to 10 days. If your next outpatient appointment is sooner than this, please let the radiographer know so the report can be made available for that date.

If you have any questions, please contact the MRI department on 0151 556 5196.

Please note, we scan patients who have been referred for investigation of a range of conditions, not only for cancer.

If appropriate, however, for general information you can contact the Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Helpline on 0151 556 5570.

How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.

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