

Having a breast MRI scan



Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at ndht.pals@nhs.net.

What is an MRI scan?

MRI stands for magnetic resonance imaging. It uses magnetism and radio waves to create cross sectional pictures of the body. It produces pictures from angles all around the body and shows up soft tissues very clearly.

Why is a breast MRI scan needed?

For women with lobular breast cancer, a breast MRI scan might be used to see the cancer. This is because lobular breast cancer doesn't show up well on mammogram or breast ultrasound. A breast MRI scan might also be used to assess the size of the cancer to check which kind of surgery is possible.

MRI scan is also used in breast screening for young women who are at higher risk of developing cancer.

Preparing for your MRI scan

Before you go to your appointment, or when you arrive, you fill in a safety checklist. This asks about:

- any operations you've had
- whether you have any metal implants or other metals in your body

An MRI scan uses strong magnetism which could affect any metal in your body. This includes:

- Pacemakers or an implantable defibrillator (to treat abnormal heart rhythms)
- Surgical clips, pins or plates
- Cochlear implants (for deafness)
- Metal fragments anywhere in your body – for example from an injury, dental fillings and bridges

You can still have an MRI scan if you have some metals in your body, but your doctor and radiographer decide if it's safe for you. Tell the radiographer about any metals in your body.

Some people feel claustrophobic or closed in when they're having an MRI scan. Contact the department before your test if you're likely to feel like this. The hospital staff can take extra care to make sure you're comfortable and that you understand what's going on. Your doctor can give you medicine to help you relax if you need to.

An MRI scan is generally safe during pregnancy. But as a precaution, you usually won't have one during the first 3 months of your pregnancy.

Tell the department staff beforehand if you think you're pregnant.

What to expect when you arrive at the scan department

The radiographer might ask you to change into a hospital gown. You have to:

- remove any jewellery, including body piercings and your watch
- remove your hair clips
- empty your pockets of coins and keys

It's safe to take a relative or friend into the scanning room with you. But check with the department staff first. Your friend or relative will also need to remove any metal they have on them.

In the scanning room

You lie on your back on a couch that can slide into the MRI machine. You might have an injection of a dye (contrast medium) through a small plastic tube (cannula) into a vein in your arm. This helps to show up your body's organs more clearly. Your radiographer will check first about any medical conditions or allergies you have.

After the dye injection, you may:

- feel sick
- have a headache
- feel warm or flushed
- have a metallic taste in your mouth
- feel a little dizzy

These effects are usually mild and last for a short time. Tell your radiographer if you feel unwell at any point during or after your scan.

Having the MRI scan

You need to lie as still as possible. The scan is painless but it can be uncomfortable to stay still. Tell your radiographer if you're getting stiff and need to move. Once you're in the right position on the couch, your radiographer leaves the room. They can see you on a TV screen or through a window at all times from the control room. You can talk to each other through an intercom.

The couch moves through the MRI scanner. It takes pictures as you move through it. Your radiographer might ask you to hold your breath at times.

The scanner makes a very loud clanging sound throughout the scan. You wear headphones to protect your hearing. You can also listen to music (please bring your own CD). Keeping your eyes closed can help.

What happens after the test?

When the scan is over, your radiographer comes back into the room and lowers the couch so that you can get up.

You usually stay in the department for about 15 minutes after your scan if you've had the dye. This is in case it makes you feel unwell.

Your radiographer removes the cannula from the vein in your arm before you leave.

You should then be able to go home or back to work, and also eat and drink normally.

Getting your results

You should get your results within 1 or 2 weeks at a follow-up appointment. Waiting for test results can be a very worrying time. You might have contact details for a specialist nurse who you can contact for information if you need to. It can help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you feel.

Are there any risks?

An MRI scan is very safe and doesn't use radiation. Some people can't have an MRI scan but the checklist picks this up beforehand. Your doctor and radiographer make sure the benefits of having the test outweigh any possible risks. The risks include:

Bruising and swelling: You might get a small bruise around the area where they put the needle in for the cannula. There's a risk that the contrast medium will leak outside the vein. This can cause swelling and pain in your arm but it's rare. Tell your radiographer if you have any swelling or pain. Let your GP know if it doesn't get better or starts to get worse when you're at home.

Allergic reaction: An allergic reaction to the contrast medium injection is rare. This most often starts with feeling weak, sweating and difficulty breathing. Tell your radiographer straight away if you feel unwell so they can give you medicine to control the reaction.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the Breast Care Nursing Team on 01271 349115 or 01271 349168.

Alternatively, you can email us at ndht.breastcare@nhs.net

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple
Devon EX31 4JB
Tel. 01271 322577
www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk

© Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
This leaflet was designed by the Communications Department.
Tel: 01271 313970 / email: ndht.contactus@nhs.net