

TESTfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®

MRI With or Without Contrast



What is an MRI?

Your doctor has suggested you have an MRI as part of the evaluation at National Jewish Health. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is an advanced medical imaging technique that does not use x-ray or radiation. Instead it uses a strong magnetic field, radio waves, and a computer to create detailed images of internal body structures.

An MRI is used to examine soft tissues like organs, muscles, tendons, & blood vessels in many parts of the body. This includes areas of the brain, spine, abdomen, chest, pelvis, and joints (like knees and shoulders). The MR image offers unique information to help your doctor better plan your treatment and care.

How do you get ready for the test?

Planning Ahead:

- ✓ Inform your doctor if you have any of these items: a pacemaker, aneurysm clips, metallic implants, metal fragments in your eyes or any other electronic or magnetically activated implant. If you have any of these items it may not be possible, or safe, to have an MRI scan.
- ✓ If your MRI requires the injection of a contrast agent, blood work may need to be done before your MRI to make sure your kidneys are working well.
- ✓ If you are claustrophobic or experience pain when lying on your back, let your doctor know before the day of your MRI. Your doctor can prescribe a relaxant or pain medication.
- ✓ If your doctor has you take a relaxant medication, arrange for a companion (family member or friend) to pick you up after your MRI. You will not be able to drive or take a taxi home after the test if you take a relaxant medication.
- ✓ If you are pregnant or breast feeding, please notify your doctor before scheduling the MRI.

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The day of the test:

- ✓ There are no food or drink restrictions. Continue to take your normal medications unless your doctor directs you otherwise.

What is done during the test?

When you arrive in radiology you will be asked to fill out a screening form asking about anything that might create a health risk or interfere with imaging.

- ✓ You will be given scrubs to change into before your exam. Metallic objects such as hair barrettes, hairpins, jewelry and watches will need to be removed before entering the MRI room. You will be provided with a secure locker to lock up your purse, wallet, cards with magnetic strips, keys, cell phones, beepers, coins, etc. Eyeglasses, dentures, shoes, and foil lined medication patches will need to be removed before the imaging.
- ✓ The technologist will explain the MRI scan to you before you start. Ask questions if you don't understand.
- ✓ You will be required to wear earplugs or headphones to protect your hearing from the loud noise produced during the scan. For some exams, you can listen to music through headphones.
- ✓ You will lie down on a padded scanning table that glides you into a large, tubular machine. The inside of the scanner is well lit and has a fan to blow fresh air gently over you. The technologist will be able to see, hear and speak with you at all times using a 2-way intercom. The machine makes a rhythmic knocking and thumping sounds as it takes the images.
- ✓ Your doctor may request that you receive an injection of a contrast agent called "gadolinium". If you are having an MRI with contrast, the technologist will start an IV in your arm. Unlike contrast agents used in x-ray studies, MRI contrast agents do not contain iodine and rarely cause allergic reactions or other problems.
- ✓ MRI images are very sensitive to movement. You will be asked to remain perfectly still during the time the imaging takes place.

What should you do after the test?

You can resume your normal activity after the test is complete.

How long will the test take?

An MRI takes between 30-60 minutes, depending upon the part of the body being imaged.

How will you get the test results?

The doctor who ordered the test will receive the results. Please contact the doctor who ordered the test for any test results.

How do you get to your test?

Your appointment is in the Institute for Advanced Biomedical Imaging (Radiology). You will be directed where to go when you check-in. If you have any questions you can contact Advanced Biomedical Imaging (Radiology) at 303-398-1611. PTE176, 1/13, 1/18