Fact sheet

MRI

This fact sheet tells you what a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan is, and what is involved. Please read before having your MRI. If you have any questions, ask your doctor.

What is an MRI scan?

A MRI scan uses a strong magnetic field, radio waves and a computer. It shows clear and detailed images of the bones, tissues and organs of your body. MRI scans do not use X-rays (radiation).

Avoiding exposure to radiation benefits children and young adults, and those with ongoing health conditions requiring regular scans.

Procedure

You will be given instructions on how to prepare for your scan, particularly about metal objects inside or outside your body.

You should tell your doctor and the imaging staff if you are claustrophobic, have allergies, are pregnant or think you may be pregnant.

You will be asked to complete an MRI safety checklist for metal objects. You might also be asked to complete another safety checklist if you are having an injection of contrast (see *Iodinated contrast* fact sheet).

You will not feel anything during the scan but it is very noisy, so you will be given earplugs. You must remain very still during the examination.

You might need to have a contrast injected into a vein in your arm to show the area more clearly. If you are claustrophobic, you might need an eye mask or even sedation.

The MRI will take between 20 minutes and an hour, depending on the body part being scanned.

After the procedure

A radiologist (a specialist doctor) will assess the images and send the results to your treating doctor. You should not have any issues after your test.

Risks involved

Metal objects can move or get hot. Electrical currents may lead to problems with a device such as a pacemaker. The strong magnet in the MRI machine can alter or wipe information from other magnetic devices. Some of these interactions can cause harm or death, so it is important to let the doctors know if you have any of these kinds of objects on or in your body.

Metal objects that are attracted to magnets can be pulled rapidly into the MRI machine. This can damage the machine and injure anyone in the way.

If you are required to have an injection ofcontrast, there is a very small risk of an allergic reaction. Minor reactions (such as hives or itchy eyes) occur in about 1 in 1000 people. More serious reactions (difficulty in breathing or collapse) may occur in 1 in 10,000 people.

For more information

InsideRadiology by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists: www.insideradiology.com.au

RadiologyInfo by the American College of Radiology and Radiological Society of North America: www.radiologyinfo.org

The Alliance for Radiation Safety in Pediatric Imaging: www.imagegently.org

For more information, please contact:

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