

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)

What is an MRI scan?

MRI stands for magnetic resonance imaging. MRI scans use a strong magnetic field and low energy radio waves to create high-resolution images of selected anatomy. It highlights any pathology or injury present with exquisite and precise detail.

Do I need to prepare for my MRI scan?

At the time of booking and on arrival, you must complete a safety questionnaire. This is to ensure your safety, as patients who have certain metal implants may be at risk of either damage to their implant or themselves. Many metal implants have been tested and are safe to enter the room, but others, like pacemakers, can be very dangerous.

The safety questionnaire forms a critical part of preparations for your MRI scan, and you will be asked the same questions at multiple stages during your booking to make sure you are safe to enter the room. Please be patient in answering these questions, as your safety is paramount.

If you have ever had an injury to your eyes involving metal, please inform our staff. You may need to have an x-ray of your eyes to ensure no residual metal fragments are present.

Please let a staff member know if you are claustrophobic - it may be a good idea to bring a friend into the room with you. Oral sedation can also be arranged.

In most cases, no other special preparation is required for an MRI scan. You may have to follow special instructions for specific scans; if this is the case, a staff member will let you know at the time of booking.

You will be given a full explanation of the procedure by an MRI radiographer. Please feel free to ask questions if you have any concerns.

What can I take into the MRI room?

The magnet that powers the MRI machine is extremely powerful and has the potential to cause you serious damage. MRI machines can pull metal objects with great force, or cause them to heat up.

The magnet will also erase any cards with magnetic strips such as bank or credit cards, and damage most electronic and mechanical devices, including phones and watches. Jewellery made of conductive materials is at risk of heating; some precautions can be taken if you cannot remove your jewellery. However, please try to remove all jewellery and body piercings prior to your scan.

Please also refrain from wearing mascara or eye makeup, as metallic components in these products can interfere with your scan. If you wear clothing with metal studs or clips, you will be asked to change into a gown for your own safety.

What happens during an MRI scan?

The MRI machine looks like a large tube with a short tunnel through the centre. You will be asked to lie down on a movable table that slides into the opening. You will be monitored from our console room and you can talk to the radiographer by microphone between scans. There is also an emergency alarm available if you need any assistance during your scan.

The procedure is painless. An antenna, which receives image signals from your body, will be placed around the region of interest. This region will be moved to the centre of the MRI scanner for the duration of the scan. You will be provided with ear protection prior to the commencement of the scan, as the machine generates a loud rhythmic array of sounds, which can vary from 2-4 minutes at a time.

It is important that you feel comfortable, calm, and relaxed, as you will be asked to remain as still as possible for the duration of the scan. This will allow the radiographer to capture images of maximum quality.

Following your scan, your report and images will be sent electronically to your doctor.

Are there any risks associated with an MRI scan?

MRI scans do not use ionising radiation and are considered very safe, especially if you need multiple scans. MRI itself has no known harmful effects but is not recommended during pregnancy unless under special circumstances.

Sometimes, you may receive an injection of a contrast material called gadolinium to better assess blood flow to the region of interest. As with anything that is injected into the body, there is an extremely small risk of an allergic reaction to this agent. Please let a Qscan staff member know if you have had any previous reactions to MRI contrast.

Contrast injections are not advised during pregnancy or while breastfeeding unless specifically required. These potential risks will be discussed on the day if necessary.

How long will my MRI scan take?

Depending on the region being scanned, the time required your scan may vary.

MRI scans for most regions of the body should take up to 25 minutes once everything is prepared and set up. If you require scans for multiple regions of your body, you will be repositioned with the antenna around the new region of interest before the scanning process restarts.

How much will my MRI scan cost?

The cost of your MRI scan depends on several factors, including the type of scan that your doctor has requested, how many regions of the body require imaging, the duration of the scan(s), and the specialty of your referring doctor.

Qscan's customer service team will be able to advise you of all costs involved with your MRI scan including any out-of-pocket costs.