

Understanding MRI Scans

What is an MRI?

Magnetic Resonance Images (MRI) are produced by using two natural, harmless forces—magnetic fields and radio waves. With the use of computers, information from your scan is made into two dimensional pictures of the body allowing doctors to provide an accurate diagnosis of your medical condition. MRI exams are painless and have no known side effects.

Images created by the MRI scanner are similar to an X-ray, but the MRI process can “see” through hard bone to the soft tissues in your body like muscles and internal organs.

Why is an MRI performed?

An MRI is performed to diagnose a large number of potential problems in many different parts of the body. In general, MRI creates pictures that can show differences between healthy and unhealthy tissue.

What should I do before coming in for my MRI?

No special preparation is required prior to an MRI scan. You may eat normally and go about your daily routine. Continue to take any medication prescribed by your doctor unless otherwise directed.

Comfortable, athletic-type clothing (like a sweat suit) without metal snaps or zippers is the recommended type of clothing to wear to your appointment. Gowns and scrubs will also be available.

You should plan on arriving at the hospital 30 minutes before your scan to allow for completing any necessary paperwork.

Because of the magnetic field, you will be asked to leave the following items in a safe place outside the scan room:

- Coins
- Watches
- Keys
- Credit Cards
- Jewelry
- Hair Pins/Wigs
- Glasses
- Other Metal Objects

You may need to get x-rays of your eyes before the scan if you work with metal or weld to make sure no small pieces of metal are stuck in your eye that might come loose because of the strong magnet.

You may be asked to remove makeup, dentures and hearing aids.

Is an MRI a safe procedure?

MRI scanners do not use X-rays. Instead they use a very strong magnet and radio waves.

Because a magnet is involved you will be asked if you have had brain, ear, eye or other surgeries or any of the following:

- Pacemaker
- Neuro-stimulators (TENS-unit)
- Metal Implants
- Aneurysm Clips
- Surgical Staples
- Implanted Drug Infusion Device (Insulin Pump)
- Exposure of metal fragments to your eye
- Shrapnel
- Permanent Eyeliner
- Heart Valves

If you are pregnant, please notify your doctor and the BAMC staff.

If you weigh more than 300 pounds, have your doctor contact BAMC.

Please check with your doctor if you are uncertain about any of the above mentioned items.

What will happen during my MRI?

In the magnet room, a technologist will assist you onto the padded table. The table will move slowly into the magnet opening. You will hear sounds similar to a drumbeat or knocking as pictures of your body are formed. Your doctor may order contrast (dye) to be administered for your test to enhance areas of interest.

The scanner does not touch you and you will not feel anything. At all times during the exam a technologist will be able to see and hear you. Stereo headphones will be available for you to listen to your favorite radio channel, cassette or CD. Please feel free to bring your personal choice with you to the center.

How long will the MRI take?

The scan takes about 30 to 75 minutes depending on the type of information your doctor needs. It is important to lie completely still while the images are being acquired. Motion will affect the sharpness of the images.

What happens after the MRI?

Because there are no side effects, you may leave immediately following the procedure. The radiologist will study the MR images and report the results to your doctor. Your doctor will schedule a time with you to discuss the results of your MRI.

How will I be billed for this?

All charges for your visit will be submitted to your insurance carrier including those from BAMC and from the health care providers involved in your MRI scan. Please bring your insurance card and referral/authorization form (if necessary) on the day of your appointment. Some insurance carriers require precertification for MRI scans.

For information on financial counseling or payment questions, call 715-735-8012.

What if I have to cancel my appointment?

Cancellations sometimes are unavoidable; however, we ask that you notify us one day in advance whenever possible. This courtesy assists the staff in daily scheduling of other patients who may be waiting for an appointment. Contact BAMC at 715-735-4200 (Ext. 3301) to cancel or reschedule an appointment.