

Patient advice sheet

Breast MRI

Your breast MRI appointment

The MRI department will send you an appointment letter advising you of the date and time of your breast MRI scan. The scans are usually done within 2 weeks from the time the scan is requested by your doctor.

You will receive an “MRI Safety Questionnaire” and an “MRI Information Sheet” with your appointment letter. Please complete the safety questionnaire and remember to bring it with you on the day of the scan. It will help to ensure that an MRI scan is safe and suitable for you.

Before the scan you may eat and drink as normal and continue taking your usual medication.

What is a Breast MRI?

MRI stands for Magnetic Resonance Imaging. The technique uses magnetic fields and radio waves to produce detailed images of the breasts. An MRI scanner is a large cylinder (tube) that contains powerful magnets. During the scan you lie face down on a couch that moves automatically through the cylinder. This will take between 20 and 30 minutes.

When is breast MRI used?

Breast MRI is not a replacement for mammograms (breast X-rays) or ultrasound, but is used to provide additional information about your breast tissue, for example:

- To accurately measure the size of a cancerous lump if there is a difference between the mammogram and ultrasound sizes.
- To check for other cancers in cases when more than one breast cancer has been identified on ultrasound and mammograms.
- Invasive lobular cancer - A small proportion of cases with this subtype of breast cancer may have another small cancerous lump in the same breast or in the other breast. Breast MRI is done in most cases with this type of cancer before treatment is planned.
- Neo-adjuvant Chemotherapy - This is when chemotherapy is given to shrink a cancerous breast lump before surgery. Breast MRI helps to accurately determine the size of the cancerous mass and to measure the effect of chemotherapy on the lump by monitoring the size on subsequent scans.
- To provide additional screening for some cases who have an increased risk of breast cancer.

What are the possible side effects or complications?

A breast MRI scan is a safe, painless and relatively quick procedure and it does not use radiation.

The following are some potential issues that may arise:

- The dye injected into your arm during the procedure can cause some discomfort and a very small number of people may have an allergic reaction to the dye.
- Some people find it uncomfortable to lie on their front.
- The scanner makes a loud noise during the procedure. We can give you headphones or earplugs to wear.

How will I get my results?

How you receive the results of your MRI scan will depend on the reason for your scan and who referred you. The results may come to you by letter, telephone or at an appointment in person, depending on your treatment pathway.

To avoid delays in your investigations and treatment we may call you for further investigations before you receive your formal MRI results. This is because MRI is a very sensitive test and often highlights areas that we will want to look at more closely.

One of the drawbacks of Breast MRI is that it detects benign (non-cancerous lumps) as well as cancers and therefore sometimes normal tissue may also look a little abnormal on breast MRI.

Most new areas identified by MRI are benign – although a small proportion are cancers. If the abnormality is not seen on ultrasound and there is still concern that it may represent a small cancerous lump, an MRI guided biopsy of the area may be arranged. Only a few people will need to have this done.

The Breast Care Nurses will be happy to answer any further questions or concerns. They can be contacted at Wycombe Hospital. Please leave a message and they will return your call.

Breast Care Nurses: 01494 426228

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. Please follow our infection prevention and control guidelines when visiting our healthcare sites. Further information is available on our website.

Patient Advice Sheet

If you would like a copy of this information on audiotape, in large print or translated, please call the Patient Advice Liaison Service on 01296 831120 or email bht.pals@nhs.net