

MRI: Abdomen Scan

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how an MRI scan of the abdomen works, how to prepare, what to expect during the scan, and how to get your results.

What is MRI?

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a way to take pictures of your internal organs and tissues. It uses radio waves and a strong magnet to provide clear and detailed pictures. Even different types of tissue within the same organ can easily be seen in an MRI image.

MRI will help your healthcare provider decide which treatment is best for your health condition.

What is an MRI of the abdomen?

An MRI scan of the *abdomen* (belly) usually involves taking at least 4 sets of pictures. Each set lasts 14 seconds to 4 minutes and will show a different area of your abdomen.



An MRI image of the abdomen.

For Your Safety

Health Review

We need to know about certain **health conditions** before your MRI scan. Please tell us if you:

- Have any problems with your liver or kidneys
- Are on dialysis
- Need a liver or kidney transplant
- Have allergies to any drugs or *contrast* (X-ray dye)
- Have had any surgeries
- Are pregnant or may be pregnant

Screening for Metal

We also need to know if you have any **metal in or on your body** before we give you an MRI scan. The strong MRI magnet will pull on any *ferromagnetic* object, such as iron and some other metals.

If you have any metal on or in your body, an MRI can harm you. Even small amounts that do not harm your body can distort the MRI picture.

Please tell MRI staff if you have:

- Aneurysm clips, a heart pacemaker (or artificial heart valve), an implanted port, an infusion catheter (with brand names such as Port-o-cath, Infusaport, or Lifeport), an intrauterine device (IUD), any metal plates, clips, pins, screws, or surgical staples, a prosthetic hip, or any implanted metal object in your body

Most times, surgical staples, clips, plates, pins, and screws are not a risk during MRI if they have been in place for more than 4 to 6 weeks. If there is any question, we may do an X-ray to check for metal fragments.

- Tattoos or permanent eyeliner
- Medicine patches
- A bullet or shrapnel in your body
- Ever worked with metal

Please also **remove any other items that might contain metal.**

These include:

- Hairpins
- Jewelry
- Glasses, hearing aids, and any removable dental work

How do I prepare?

- Please talk with your referring provider if you have any concerns about managing pain or anxiety during your MRI scan.
- If your scan is in the **morning**:
 - The evening before your scan, have a light dinner, such as eggs or a sandwich.
 - Do **not** eat breakfast on the morning of your scan.

- If your scan is in the **afternoon**:
 - On the morning of your scan, have a light breakfast, such as an egg and toast, or cereal.
 - Do **not** eat lunch.
- Take your regular medicines.
- Starting 4 hours before your scan time, do **not** eat any solid food.
- It is OK to drink liquids that do not contain caffeine, milk, or chocolate up to 1 hour before your scan.

How is the scan done?

- You must change into a hospital gown before your scan. We will give you a gown when you arrive in the MRI department.
- You will lie on a sliding table and a device called a *surface coil* will be placed around your abdomen.
- The MRI technologist will slide the table inside the MRI unit and then leave the room to take the MRI pictures.
- You will be able to talk with the technologist at any time through an intercom.
- We will ask you to hold very still as each picture is taken. We may also ask to hold your breath for some of the pictures.
- The scan usually takes 20 to 45 minutes.
- Sometimes, an injection of a *contrast* is used to make certain tissues or blood vessels easier to see. If you need this injection:
 - Your doctor will talk with you about it before your scan.
 - You will receive the injection about halfway through the scan.
 - It will be injected through a small needle and an *intravenous* (IV) line in your arm or hand vein.
 - If your doctor has asked for *delayed enhancement images*, we will need to take more images 20 minutes after your contrast injection. This will add about 5 to 10 minutes to the length of the scan.
- After the scan, we will ask you to wait until we check the images for quality. If needed, we will take more pictures.
- When your scan is over, the surface coil will be removed.

What will I feel during the scan?

- MRI does not cause pain.
- Some patients may feel confined or uneasy (*claustrophobic*) when they are inside the MRI unit. Please tell the doctor who referred you for the MRI if you are claustrophobic. You may receive medicine to help you relax.
- You may feel warmth in the area where the pictures are taken. This is normal. If it bothers you, please tell the MRI technologist.
- You will hear loud tapping or knocking noises during the scan. We will provide earplugs and headphones with music to help block some of these sounds.
- If a contrast injection is needed, you may feel discomfort or coolness at the injection site.

After the Scan

- Drink plenty of fluids the rest of the day to help flush the contrast out of your body. Try to drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluid.
- **If an oral anti-bowel medicine was used for your MRI:** Do **not** drive for 4 hours after your exam. To get home after your scan, you can have someone drive you; you can take a bus, taxi, or shuttle; or you can walk.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in MRI will review and interpret your MRI images. The radiologist will not talk with you about the results, but will send a report to your primary care or referring provider. This provider will give you the results.

You and your provider will then decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

You may also read your results on your eCare Results page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call 206.598.6206.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- UWMC Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- Harborview Imaging Services: 206.744.3105