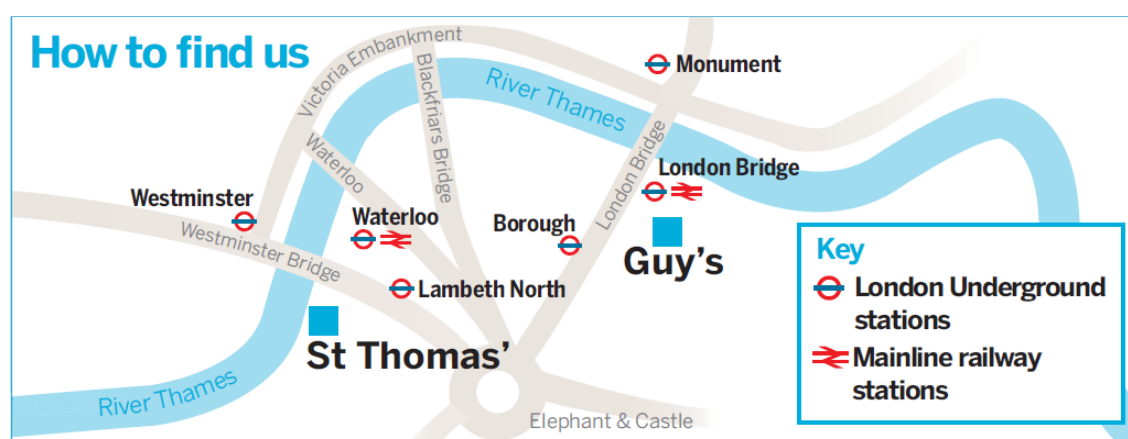


# Having an MRI scan

**Please note:** MRI scans take place at both Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals.

Please check your appointment letter carefully before setting out for your appointment.



## St Thomas' Hospital MRI

1st Floor, Lambeth Wing  
St Thomas' Hospital  
Westminster Bridge Road  
SE1 7EH

**OR**

**OR**

## Guy's Hospital MRI

2nd Floor, Tower Wing  
Guy's Hospital  
Great Maze Pond  
SE1 9RT

## Guy's Cancer Centre

Outpatients Village Floor 0  
Cancer Centre  
Guy's Hospital  
Great Maze Pond  
London SE1 9RT

**MRI appointments:** 020 7188 5542

**Hospital switchboard:** 020 7188 7188

**Getting here:** For travel information and detailed maps, go to [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk)

**The aim of this information sheet is to answer some of the questions you may have about having an MRI scan. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.**

## **What is an MRI scan?**

MRI stands for magnetic resonance imaging. An MRI scan uses a combination of a strong magnet and radiowaves to produce detailed pictures of the inside of your body.

## **What are the benefits of an MRI scan?**

An MRI scan can help to find out what is causing your problem and help your doctor to find the best treatment for you.

An MRI scan provides much more detailed pictures of your body than an ordinary x-ray. It is particularly good at identifying problems in the spine, the brain and in the joints. It is also helpful for looking at other parts of the body, often when other types of scan have not given a full picture. Unlike x-rays and CT (computerised tomography) scans, MRI scans do not use radiation.

## **Are there any risks?**

MRI is a very safe procedure for most patients. However, patients with heart pacemakers and certain other surgical implants, for example a cochlear implant, cannot be scanned. You will be asked to complete and sign a safety questionnaire before your scan to make sure it is safe for you to be scanned.

## **Is it safe for me to be scanned if I am pregnant?**

National Safety Guidelines recommend that we do not scan pregnant women unless the scan is clinically urgent. The doctor who refers you for the scan, along with the radiologist (doctor who uses x-ray to diagnose and treat illnesses) will decide whether they believe your scan is necessary.

Many pregnant women have had MRI scans both at Guy's and St Thomas' and at other MRI centres worldwide, with no reported problems. If you have been referred for an MRI scan when you are pregnant and would like further information, please do not hesitate to call us (contact details on page 4).

## **Are there any alternatives?**

If you cannot have a scan, for example if you have a pacemaker, the radiologist may suggest an alternative type of imaging. This could be a CT scan or an ultrasound scan.

## **Giving your consent**

The radiographer (member of the radiology team trained to carry out scans) will ask you if you are happy for the scan to go ahead. This is called verbal consent and may only involve the radiographer checking you are booked for the correct scan. If you do not wish to have the scan or are undecided, please tell the radiographer.

It is your decision and you can change your mind at any time. Please bear in mind that not having the scan may delay your diagnosis as the doctors may not have all of the information that they need. Please remember that you can ask the radiographer any questions you have at any time before, during or after your scan. If you would like to read our consent policy, please tell a member of staff.

## **What do I have to do to prepare for the scan?**

In most cases you do not need to do anything to prepare for the scan. You can eat and drink as normal. If you are taking any medication, please continue to take this. If we do need you to do anything in preparation, we will send you information about this with your appointment letter.

## **Will I need an injection?**

If we are scanning certain areas of your body, we may need to give you an injection of contrast dye. The dye shows up on the scan and gives us more detailed pictures, particularly of your blood vessels. The injection will be given by inserting a small needle into a vein in your arm or your hand.

The contrast dye contains gadolinium, which may, occasionally, cause allergic reactions. The most common allergic reactions can present as headaches, nausea and vomiting, sneezing, wheezing, runny nose, eye irritation, itching, hives, skin rash, swelling of the face, mouth, hands, feet or throat, difficulty in breathing, and low blood pressure. Before your scan we will check whether you have had any previous allergies. If you would like more information about the injection, please ask the radiographer before your scan.

## **What do I need to wear?**

We may ask you to change into a hospital gown if any metal fastenings, such as zips or hooks and eyes, on your clothes are close to the area we are going to scan. This is because the fastenings may spoil the pictures.

You will need to empty your pockets of any coins, as these may be pulled out by the magnet and fly into the scanner. You will need to take off your watch and take any credit cards or travel cards with magnetic strips out of your pockets. The scanner can affect these and stop them from working.

If we are scanning your head, you will need to remove any dentures that contain metal. Dental fillings will not affect the scan. Hairclips and wigs must also be removed if they contain metal.

## **What happens during the scan?**

Before the scan, you will be given the opportunity to ask the radiographer any questions you have.

We will ask you to lie on the scanner bed where you will be made as comfortable as possible. If this is not comfortable, please tell us, as you will need to keep very still during the scan. It is important that you do not move, or the pictures could be blurred and the scan will have to be repeated. Once you are positioned correctly, we will move you into the scanner – the part of your body that we are scanning must be in the centre of the machine. For scans of the chest or abdomen, you may be asked to hold your breath for a short while.

When the scanner is working, it makes a loud banging noise. We will give you headphones to wear to reduce the noise. You can listen to music while you are being scanned – so please bring in a CD of your choice! You will also be given a buzzer to press if you need to attract our attention during your scan.

## **How long will the scan take?**

This depends on which part of your body is being scanned and the information that your doctor needs. The radiographer will tell you how long he/she expects your scan to take. Most scans take between 20 and 30 minutes.

## Will I feel anything?

The scan should be completely painless. The most difficult part is keeping still. Make sure you are as comfortable as possible before we start and try to relax. The scanner is a short tunnel, so if you get claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces) please let us know before you come for your scan.

## Will there be anyone with me during the scan?

The radiographer will talk to you during the scan to let you know what is happening. If you are particularly anxious, a friend or relative can stay in the room during the scan.

## Can I bring my children?

Unfortunately, we are not able to offer childcare facilities and your children cannot go into the scan room with you. If you need to bring your children with you, please bring along an adult who can look after them while you are having the examination.

## What happens afterwards?

As soon as the scan is finished, you can go home, or back to your ward if you are staying in the hospital. You can eat and drink as normal and resume your usual activities.

The pictures taken during the scan are carefully studied by the radiologist who will produce a detailed report.

If you had the injection of contrast dye, an allergic reaction can very rarely occur up to two days after the scan (please read **Will I need an injection?** section on page 3 for allergic reactions to look out for). If this happens, please contact the MRI department where you had your scan for advice. Alternatively, if it is out of hours, contact your local A&E department.

## When will I get the results?

The results will be sent to the doctor who referred you for the scan – usually a hospital specialist. If you make a clinic appointment for two weeks after the scan, the results should be available. For more urgent problems, they may be available sooner.

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your MRI scan please contact the MRI department on **020 7188 5542** between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

**Please visit the MRI section on our website for more information:**

[www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/radiology/types/mri.aspx](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/our-services/radiology/types/mri.aspx)

### Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)

**e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

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