

# Spine MR Scans

## Appointment Information

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

## About

Spine MR scans show the anatomy of the vertebrae that make up the spine, as well as the discs, spinal cord and the spaces between the vertebrae through which nerves pass.

Currently, MRI is the most sensitive imaging exam of the spine in routine clinical practice.

MR imaging is performed to:

- Assess the spinal anatomy and alignment.
- Detect congenital anomalies of vertebrae or the spinal cord.
- Assess problems with intervertebral disc disease (degenerated, bulging or herniated) and intervertebral joint disease, both frequent causes of severe lower back pain and sciatica (back pain radiating into a leg).
- Assess compression of spinal cord and nerves.
- Help plan spinal surgical procedures, such as decompression of a pinched nerve or spinal fusion.
- Monitor changes in the spine after an operation, such as scarring or infection.
- Explore other possible causes of back pain (compression fracture, for example).
- Image spinal infection or tumors that arise in, or have spread to, the spine.
- Assess inflammation of the spinal cord or nerves.

To perform the spine MR scan, you will be moved into the magnet of the MRI unit and the radiologist and technologist will leave the room while the MRI examination is performed.

When the examination is completed, you may be asked to wait until the technologist or radiologist checks the images in case additional images are needed.

MRI exams generally include multiple runs (sequences), some of which may last several minutes. The entire examination is usually completed within 45 minutes.

## Preparations

During your spine MRI scan you will be asked to wear a gown.

Guidelines about eating and drinking before an MRI exam vary with the specific exam. Unless you are told otherwise, you may follow your regular daily routine and take food and medications as usual.

Tell your radiologist if you have any metal screws, surgical staples or other metal in your body. You will be asked to remove any piercings if possible.

Some MRI examinations may require the patient to receive an injection of contrast material into the bloodstream. The radiologist or technologist may ask if you have allergies of any kind, such as allergy to iodine or x-ray contrast material, drugs, food, the environment, or asthma. The contrast material most commonly used for an MRI exam is called gadolinium. Because gadolinium does not contain iodine, it can be used safely in patients with contrast allergies.

The radiologist should also know if you have any serious health problems, or if you have recently had surgery. Some conditions, such as severe kidney disease may prevent you from being given contrast material for an MRI. If there is a history of kidney disease, it may be necessary to perform a blood test to determine whether the kidneys are functioning adequately.

Women should always inform their radiologist or technologist if there is any possibility that they are pregnant.



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