Your Child’s Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): What to Expect

WHAT IS AN MRI?

MRI stands for magnetic resonance imaging. An MRI scan uses the combination of a powerful magnetic field and radio frequency pulses to produce detailed images of the inside of the body. An MRI provides much more detailed images of your child’s body than an ordinary X-ray and does not involve the use of radiation.

WHO WILL PERFORM THE SCAN AND HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

Your child’s scan will be completed by an MRI technologist who is specially trained to do MRI scans, and the results of the scan will be read by a pediatric radiologist. The MRI scan may take about 30-90 minutes, depending on the body area or part that is being imaged.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD FEEL DURING THE SCAN?

An MRI scan should be completely painless. However, some types of imaging scans require contrast to be used. The contrast is given through an IV. If your child needs contrast for his/her scan, a numbing cream can be used at the insertion point to reduce discomfort.

When the MRI scanner is taking images it will make loud banging and knocking noises. Your child will be given hearing protection to help reduce the noise and protect his/her ears. Sometimes the scanner bed vibrates slightly due to the noise. This is completely normal.

Your child may also have the option to use MRI-compatible headphones or goggles to listen to music or watch a DVD during the scan.

HOW IS AN MRI PERFORMED?

Your child will be asked to lie on the MRI scanner bed, be given hearing protection and then be positioned correctly for his/her scan. Your child will then be moved into the scanner with the part of the body that is being imaged in the center of the machine. Your child will be asked to keep very still during imaging. Any movement can make the images blurry.

Throughout the scan, the MRI technologist will talk to your child to let him/her know what is happening and to make sure he/she is doing okay. Your child will also be given a buzzer to press if he/she needs to stop the scan.
HOW CAN I PREPARE MY CHILD FOR THE MRI?

Your child’s age will determine how you will prepare him/her. Toddlers and preschool-aged children require a very simple explanation of the scan just before it begins. School-aged children and adolescents require a more detailed explanation of the scan, which should be done one to two days in advance. This will allow your child time to ask any questions he/she might have prior to the procedure. Above all, it is important to be completely honest with your child about his/her procedure.

Please refer to our MRI preparation video at www.massgeneralimaging.org/pediatric.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD DURING THE PROCEDURE?

One parent will be able to stay in the MRI scanning room.* It is important that you try to remain calm throughout the scan.

*Women who are pregnant will not be allowed in the MRI scanning room.

SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS

You will be asked to complete an MRI screening form for both yourself and your child. This form will be reviewed by the MRI technologist. This form will verify that it is safe for you and your child to enter the MRI room.

If your child has an implanted device, such as a shunt, you will need to provide the following information for the implanted device:

- Manufacturer
- Model
- Serial number

Your child will not be able to have his/her MRI without this information.

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