

Your child's MRI or CT scan

This leaflet aims to answer some of the questions that you or your child may have about their scan. You will also have an opportunity to discuss any further concerns with us, on admission.

A general anaesthetic requires your child to be starved beforehand.

Morning admission:

Last food: 2.30am

Breastfeed: 4.30am

Water or weak squash until 7.30am

Afternoon admission:

Last food: 7.30am

Breastfeed: 9.30am

Water or weak squash until 12.30pm

Please be aware that milk and chewing gum is considered food.

If you do not follow these instructions your child's procedure may be delayed or even cancelled.

What is an MRI scan?

MRI stands for Magnetic Resonance Imaging. It uses powerful magnetic fields with the help of a computer to create pictures of your child's head or body. These can then be stored on the computer or on film.

What is a CT scan?

CT stands for Computerised Tomography. It is a sophisticated x-ray machine that takes pictures in a series of 'slices' through your child's head or body. These can then be stored on the computer or on disc.

Why does my child need a MRI/CT scan?

The doctors will have requested a scan to help confirm a diagnosis. Both types of scan provide information that can be extremely helpful in deciding the best course of treatment. The decision on which type of scan to use, depends on the type of information that the doctors are looking for.

What do the scans involve?

In both procedures, the examination is very simple. A CT scan usually takes no longer than 5-10 minutes – an MRI scan can take from 10-45 minutes to complete. Your child will be positioned onto a comfortable table that moves into the scanner. In the CT scan, the machine looks like a doughnut, while the MR scanner is like a tunnel.

It is very important that your child is kept very still throughout the scan. This is why it is often done under a general anaesthetic. It may be necessary to inject a contrast medium (dye) into a vein in order to help give more information. (This would be done while they are asleep if they are having a general anaesthetic.)

A parent or carer may stay with the child until they are asleep.

After that, you will be asked to wait on Kempton Day Bed Unit until the scan is finished.

What are the risks of MRI/CT scans?

Both the anaesthetic and the contrast medium (dye) that is sometimes used carry a small risk. This risk includes serious complications such as death. The risk of a general anaesthetic is usually quoted as very rare, or about 1 in 100 000 (1 person in a large town). There are more common side effects of anaesthetics including sickness, sore throat, or waking up feeling upset. These do not last long.

The anaesthetic is given by an anaesthetist (specially trained doctor). It is either given as medicine into a vein or as gas through a mask. At pre-operative assessment the nurse will go through the anaesthetic with you and your child and there are children's leaflets available to help explain things to them. The anaesthetist will assess your child on the day of the scan and you are welcome to ask any questions you may have.

What shall I bring to hospital?

For some children it is reassuring if they can bring a familiar toy from home. A play specialist may be involved in your child's care and they will be able to provide a range of suitable toys and activities. A hospital gown will be provided to wear for the scan but children can also wear their own clothes as long as there is nothing metal on the clothing, e.g. poppers, zips. Please bring in a dressing gown.

What happens on admission?

On arrival on the day of the scan, a nurse will welcome you onto the unit and have a chat about the admission.

You will have already signed a consent form prior to the scan appointment. An anaesthetist will visit you to explain about the anaesthetic. **If your child has any medical problems, for instance, allergies, please tell the doctor and anaesthetist about these.** Your child may also have some 'magic cream' (LMX4 local anaesthetic) applied to the back of their hands so that the anaesthetic injection will be less painful. One parent/carers will be able to accompany the child to the MRI/CT department and stay with them until they are asleep.

When going for an MRI scan you will be asked to fill in a checklist regarding any metal that your child or yourself may be wearing or have inside them. The MRI involves using a large magnet; therefore, metal items cannot be taken into the scan room, e.g. watches or credit cards.

What happens afterwards?

After your child has had their scan, they will be taken into the recovery room to wake up. Once they are sufficiently recovered, you may be able to accompany the nurse to collect them and bring them back to the ward. Some children can wake up crying because of the strange environment. It does not mean they are in pain.

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It is possible that your child may vomit following the anaesthetic – medicine can be given to relieve this if it persists.

When can we go home?

The procedure is done as a day case so your child may go home when both you and the staff are happy that your child has recovered sufficiently. Your child should be comfortable and alert and must have had something to eat or drink before we will allow them to go home.

Advice following MRI/CT

- Your child may give need regular Paracetamol (e.g. Calpol) after the scan. Follow the instructions on the packaging.
- The radiologist (specialist in reading x-rays/scans) will review your child's scan and send a report to the consultant who referred you for the examination. The consultant will then discuss the findings with you at your follow-up appointment.
- A nurse will telephone you the next day to check your child is not experiencing any problems.
- Your child may need one day at home following the anaesthetic. They can then safely return to school as normal.

Contacting us

Pre-clerking nurse: 0118 322 7518

Kempton Day Bed Unit: 0118 322 7512 / 8754 (Mon-Fri 7am-7pm)

Lion/Dolphin Wards: 0118 322 7519 / 8075 (outside of these hours)

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Paediatric Unit, November 2022

Next review due: November 2024

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