

Breast MRI

You've probably heard of an MRI before. MRI is short for magnetic resonance imaging. It uses radio waves and strong magnets to take detailed pictures of the inside of the body. MRIs aren't a substitute for mammograms, but they help provide additional information about an area of concern in your breast. Your doctor may recommend a breast MRI if you have certain cancer risk factors or to help diagnose other noncancerous breast conditions.

What is a breast MRI like?

Breast MRIs require a physician's order with the specific reasons for the test. If you are premenopausal and an MRI isn't urgent, your MRI should be scheduled for the second week of your menstrual cycle, ideally on days seven to 14. MRIs are usually done as an outpatient procedure at a hospital or clinic. The test itself does not cause any pain. It's important to provide any past breast images and results to your care team before your scan.

- Before your MRI, an IV will be put in your arm so that contrast material can be injected during the test. This helps show any abnormal areas of breast tissue.
- You'll lie face down on a table and put your arms above your head. Your breasts will hang down into an opening in the table so they can be scanned without being compressed.
- Then the table you're on will slide into a long, narrow tube.
- You'll hear what sounds like a washing machine—thumping, clicking and whirring noises—as the machine takes images.
- You'll be asked to lie very still, and you may be asked to hold your breath to capture the best possible images.

A breast MRI generally takes from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. In most cases, you will have the results back from your physician in one to two days.

More on back ▶



Do I need a breast MRI?

You may need a screening breast MRI if you have any of the following:

- A BRCA gene mutation
- A first-degree relative who is a BRCA gene carrier but you have not been tested
- A lifetime risk of breast cancer that is 20 - 25% or more as defined by specialized software
- Radiation to the chest between the ages of 10 and 30
- Li-Fraumeni syndrome in first-degree relatives
- Cowden and Bannayan-Riley-Ruvalcaba syndromes in first-degree relatives
- A history of breast cancer
- High risk for developing breast cancer as determined by a breast specialist
- A radiologist recommendation for imaging triangulation

Who shouldn't have a breast MRI?

A breast MRI isn't right for everyone. If you have a pacemaker or some types of cochlear implants, you may not be eligible for a breast MRI. Your doctor will also screen you for kidney disease.

You'll need a blood test before a breast MRI if you have:

- A history of kidney disease as an adult or a family history of kidney problems
- A history of kidney transplant
- Diabetes
- Paraproteinemia syndromes or diseases, such as myeloma
- Collagen vascular disease, such as lupus
- Liver disease
- A contrast study within the past seven days
- Recent surgeries
- Sickle cell disease



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