

Patient Information – MRI Contrast Media

A guide to contrast media

This information leaflet will explain what contrast media is and why you may need it. Please read this leaflet carefully. If you have any questions or concerns not answered by this leaflet, please contact the MRI department or speak to a Radiographer.

What is contrast media and what are its benefits?

If we are scanning certain areas of your body, we may need to give you an injection of contrast agent. This makes it easier for us to make certain diagnoses and identify health conditions earlier and/or more accurately than a MRI study without using a contrast agent. The injection will be given by inserting a cannula (small needle) into a vein in your arm or your hand.

What are the risks?

Before your scan, we will check whether you have had any previous allergic reactions. The contrast agent contains gadolinium, which may occasionally cause an allergic reaction or other side effects. Sneezing, wheezing, a runny nose, eye irritation, itching, hives, a skin rash, swelling of the face, mouth, hands, feet or throat, difficulty in breathing and low blood pressure may indicate an allergic reaction. Other side effects include headaches, nausea and vomiting. If you experience any of these symptoms, please inform the Radiographer. If you have left the hospital, please contact your GP for advice. If symptoms occur out of hours, contact your local emergency department.

Contrast agents have been in clinical use worldwide for over 30 years.

There are different types/brands of contrast agent that can be used for your MRI scan. In some patients, gadolinium has been retained in the body and there is the potential for this to happen to you. To date there is no scientific evidence that gadolinium retention can cause harm. We will always administer the lowest dose required to give us the most effective result for you.

Are there any alternatives?

Not all MRI studies need to use a contrast agent. If your MRI study does need to use these agents, a doctor (Radiologist) who is specially trained in the safety of these contrast agents will have reviewed your medical history and decided that your MRI study needs one of these agents. The Radiologist will have selected the agent and dose that is right for your MRI study. If you have any questions please ask a member of the MRI staff.

Consent – asking for your consent

During the pre-scan safety check, you will be asked to sign the form if you consent to receiving contrast. Please ask the Radiographer if you have any questions.

Will I feel any pain?

You will need to have an injection to place a cannula into your arm. This small tube allows us to administer the contrast at the right time. You should not feel any pain but if you do please let the Radiographer know.

What happens after your contrast media injection?

You will be required to remain in the department for 30 minutes after their injection, with the cannula in place. If you are feeling well after 30 minutes, the cannula will be removed and you can go home.