



*Getting Ready...*

# My Child Is Having An MRI







*Welcome* to Inova Fairfax Hospital for Children. Your child is going to have an MRI, and it is very important that both you and your child understand the procedure. Knowing about the procedure will help you prepare and support your child through the MRI.

This information is designed to answer your questions and help you to explain the MRI to your child. However, it does not replace information given to you by physicians, radiology technologists and other members of the medical team.

### What is an MRI?

MRI stands for Magnetic Resonance Imaging. This test uses a very strong magnetic field and radio waves to look at different parts of the body. Using MRI, the medical team can see tissues, organs, blood vessels and bones in very precise detail.



### What are the advantages of an MRI?

Because the MRI produces very clear images, it is used to examine a specific part of the body and look for abnormalities. Although the MRI machine is close to the body, it creates detailed images without touching the patient.



## What are the steps involved?

Some children need to have their MRI with the help of sedation or anesthesia. The medical staff involved in your child's care will discuss these options with you.

- If your child receives sedation or anesthesia, he or she must not eat or drink (a state called NPO) for eight hours prior to the MRI. This is important because sedation or anesthesia are most safely administered on an empty stomach. The person coordinating the MRI will discuss your child's NPO requirements with you.
- When you arrive in the MRI department, you will meet with an MRI technologist to get ready for the test. You will be asked to remove any metal or jewelry from your child so it does not interfere with the machine's magnetic field. If your child is on an IV pump from an inpatient unit, a nurse will disconnect the pump prior to the MRI.
- If your child is receiving anesthesia, you will meet the anesthesiologist. He or she will give you information about the anesthesia process and answer your questions.
- The anesthesiologist will then give your child medication through a mask or an IV that is already in place. When your child is asleep, an IV may be placed to administer intravenous medications as well. You are welcome to stay and support your child as he or she falls asleep. Then, to help the MRI staff and the anesthesiologist give your child their full attention, you will be asked to go to a nearby waiting area.
- The staff will bring you in to be with your child as he or she is waking up. We will bring you and your child to a recovery area as your child wakes up from the anesthesia.
- If your child does not receive anesthesia, he or she must stay very still until the test is completed. In this case, you may stay in the room for support.
- The results of the MRI will be given to your child's physician.



## What will my child feel during the MRI?

If your child is sedated or asleep for the MRI, he or she will not be aware of the scan itself. Still, it is helpful for some children to understand what the procedure will be like.

The MRI scanner is a very large, square machine with a round, tunnel-like hole in the center. Your child will be on a bed, inside of the machine. The scan itself will be very loud, sounding like knocking and banging. Each set of MRI pictures will take approximately two to seven minutes with short breaks of quiet time in between. The entire MRI will last between 20 and 90 minutes.



If your child is awake for the MRI, his or her ears will be covered to reduce the noise. The MRI technologist will be able to communicate with your child through an intercom during the test. The MRI staff will monitor your child through an observation window throughout the exam.

## How can I prepare my child for the MRI?

For the MRI to be a success, there are certain things to do ahead of time to prepare.

If your child is receiving anesthesia, he or she may not eat or drink anything for eight hours prior to the procedure. Your child may take prescription medications as usual, with water or other clear liquids, but not food. If you have any questions or concerns about giving your child medications before the MRI, call the radiology department at **703-698-2208** and ask to speak with an MRI technologist, or ask your inpatient nurse if your child is staying in the hospital.

In addition to getting your child physically prepared for the MRI, there are other ways to get ready. These methods vary depending on your child's age and experience.



When children do not understand a procedure, they might assume the worst and hold secret fears about what might happen. Many fear the MRI will hurt them in some way or that they will not wake up from the anesthesia. By explaining the procedure appropriately to your child, you may calm these fears and decrease your child's anxiety.



Most children are concerned with the sensations they will feel. It will be helpful to describe what the MRI machine looks like. You may choose to show your child some of the pictures in this book.

Some children, who are receiving anesthesia, may fear losing control or dislike having a mask on their face. It is important to explain to your child that receiving anesthesia is not the same as falling asleep or taking a nap. Emphasize that he or she will wake up at the end of the test when the doctor stops the medicine. It is also important to explain that your child will be able to breathe with the mask on, even though it feels and smells strange. And finally, reassure your child that while under anesthesia, doctors and nurses will be sure he or she is safe.

We hope this has given you the information you need to prepare you and your child for the MRI. The radiology team can answer any additional questions you may have regarding the procedure.

**If you have any questions  
regarding how to prepare  
your child for this appointment,  
call the Child Life Department:  
703-645-3969.**



Inova Health System is a not-for-profit health care system based in Northern Virginia that consists of hospitals and other health services including emergency and urgent care centers, home care, nursing homes, mental health and blood donor services, and wellness classes. Governed by a voluntary board of community members, Inova's mission is to provide quality care and improve the health of the diverse communities we serve.

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