



## PREPARING FOR AN MRI

# 101

When children come to Alberta Children's Hospital for an MRI, we find families who know what to expect are often less anxious and better prepared.

### What is an MRI?

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is a safe and painless test that uses a large magnet, radio waves and a computer to produce detailed pictures of the inside of the body.

### What can I expect on the day of the MRI?

Your child's test will be done in the Diagnostic Imaging Department, which is located on the main level. When you arrive, please check in at the front desk. If you need to cancel or reschedule the MRI please call 403-955-7987.

A nurse may ask you some questions and briefly examine your child. The MRI technologist will explain the test. It is best to wear comfortable clothes, free of metal buttons or zippers. A gown will be provided if needed. Certain objects containing metal such as glasses, jewellery, belts, and hair clips may need to be removed. Braces and dental fillings will not be affected by the scan.

During the test your child will lie on a moveable table that slides into a tunnel which is open at both ends. Once your child is settled on the table, the technologist will leave the room but will still be able to see, hear, and talk to your child. A call bell is also provided in case the technologist is needed. Depending on the type of test, an MRI can take between 20 - 90 minutes. Your child will need to lie very still and will hear some loud banging, knocking, buzzing and drumming noises. Headphones or ear plugs will be worn to block out some of these sounds and the technologist can even play music during the scan. Children are welcome to bring their own iPod, MP3 player, or CDs. As well, the Family & Community Resource Centre (FCRC) lends out audio books.

After the test, most children can go home without any special care.

**MRI Contrast** is sometimes given during the test so the doctor can see certain areas of the body in more detail. This solution goes into a vein using a small needle. A special numbing cream can be applied to the skin to ease any discomfort. The contrast leaves the body in the urine, usually within a few hours. It is completely gone after 24 hours.

**General Anesthesia** is sometimes given to children so they are asleep during the scan. Very young children receive it so they will remain still. Other children may require it because of their individual needs or the type of scan. If general anesthesia is needed, a nurse will call you to provide fasting instructions. You will also be asked some general health questions about your child. The anesthesiologist (sleep doctor) will talk to you right before the MRI. After the test children may need to stay in the recovery area until they are ready to go home, usually for about an hour. The staff will give you written instructions on how to care for your child at home. For more information go to *Understanding Anesthesia - FAQ* on the Alberta Children's Hospital website.

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

In general, having an MRI doesn't require any special preparation. Here are a few tips to help your child know what to expect:

- Explain the MRI test to your child:
  - Talk honestly about the MRI. Being truthful helps maintain trust and will minimize your child's anxiety.
  - Use words your child will understand.
  - Focus on what your child will see, hear and feel.
  - Assure your child that the MRI doesn't hurt and that you will be there.
  - If your child will be awake, explain the importance of lying still.
- Talk to your child about using his/her imagination during the test (eg. blasting off in a spaceship, or spending the day at the beach).
- Children learn through play. Practice lying still in a small tent or make one using blankets to help your child 'rehearse' being in the tunnel.
- Pack a few items from home such as a special toy or stuffed animal, music or video games to help distract our child while he/she waits (electronics and items with metal will not be allowed in the MRI room).

If your child is anxious about an upcoming MRI, a Child Life Specialist can help put your child at ease by telling him/her what to expect, answering questions, and offering hands on play with medical equipment. For more information contact Child Life at [child.life@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:child.life@albertahealthservices.ca).

## What else do I need to know?

The MRI technologist isn't able to discuss any test results with you. A radiologist, a doctor who specializes in looking at diagnostic scans, will review your child's MRI and send a report to the doctor who requested it.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please speak to your doctor and/or go to the following resources:

KidsHealth provides easy to understand information written for kids, teens and parents - search 'MRI' on <http://kidshealth.org>

*Child MRI Prep* and *Simply Sayin'* are interactive apps from iTunes that include realistic sounds, pictures and explanations.

For an overview of this test, search 'MRI' on The Hospital for Sick Children's website at [www.aboutkidshealth.ca](http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca)

MyHealthAlberta has detailed information that you can access by searching 'MRI' on <https://myhealth.alberta.ca>

For a printable version of this document go to Health Information on the FCRC website - <http://fcrc.ahs.ca/health-information/mri/>

## Contact Us

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