



# MRI of the Neck

## *How to prepare for your procedure*

**An MRI exam of the neck provides detailed pictures of the neck and other structures. Read this handout to learn about how the exam works, how it is performed, how to prepare for the exam, what to expect during the exam, and how to get your results.**

### **What is MRI?**

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) uses radio waves and a strong magnetic field instead of X-rays to provide clear and detailed pictures.

### **How does the exam work?**

MRI is a unique exam. Unlike standard X-rays, radioisotope studies, and CT scanning, it does not rely on radiation. Instead, MRI uses radio waves and a strong magnetic field to create sharp pictures – even different types of tissue within the same organ can easily be seen. An MRI of the neck consists of about 2 to 6 sequences of pictures, each lasting 2 to 5 minutes. Each sequence shows a cross-section of the neck.

### **How is the exam performed?**

1. You will be placed on a sliding table and a device called a *surface coil* will be placed behind and in front of your neck.
2. You will be moved so that your neck is halfway inside the MRI machine. The technologist then leaves the room and will talk with you through the intercom.
3. You will be able to talk with the technologist at any time using an intercom.
4. Based on how many pictures are needed, the exam will take 15 to 45 minutes.
5. You will be asked to relax and hold still during the exam to avoid blurring the images.
6. Some patients will require an injection of a contrast material to make certain tissues or blood vessels easier to see. A small needle connected to an intravenous (IV) line is placed in an arm or hand vein. The contrast material is injected about two-thirds of the way through the exam.
7. All images will be checked for quality before you leave.

## Questions?

Call 206-598-6200

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC MRI staff are also available to help at any time.

Imaging Services:  
206-598-6200

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## How should I prepare for the exam?

Tell the MRI staff if you:

- Have a heart pacemaker (or artificial heart valve), aneurysm clips, prosthetic hip, implanted port, infusion catheter (brand names of Port-o-cath, Infusaport, or Lifeport), intrauterine device (IUD), or any metal plates, clips, pins, screws, or surgical staples in your body.
- Have tattoos or permanent eyeliner.
- Have a bullet or shrapnel in your body.
- Have ever worked with metal.
- Have tooth fillings or braces.
- Have allergies to contrast material or drugs.
- Have had any surgeries.
- May be pregnant.

In most cases, surgical staples, clips, plates, pins, and screws pose no risk during the exam if they have been in place for more than 4 to 6 weeks. An X-ray may be done to detect any metal objects.

Remove any items that might affect MRI pictures, including hairpins, jewelry, glasses, hearing aids, and any removable dental work.

## What will I feel during the MRI exam?

MRI causes no pain. You may notice a warm feeling in the area being scanned. This is normal, but if it's too warm tell the MRI technologist so the fan can be turned up to keep you cool. If a contrast injection is needed, you may feel discomfort or a cool sensation at the injection site during the injection. For many patients, the loud tapping or knocking noises heard at certain phases of the exam are annoying. Earplugs or music will be provided.

## Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in MRI will review and interpret the findings. The radiologist will not discuss the results with you, but will send a report to your primary care or referring doctor, who will give you the results.

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