

Spine MRI - An MRI of the spine demonstrates the anatomy of the spinal canal (cervical, thoracic or lumbar spine) and is used to evaluate disc, spinal cord, or nerve pathology.

Reasons for this test

Your doctor may order a spine MRI to evaluate the following:

- Back pain
- Neck pain
- Tingling or pain radiating down arms or legs
- Unexplained hip pain
- Difficulty gripping or walking
- Question of cancer
- Multiple Sclerosis

Possible complications

Some MRI exams require an injection of intravenous MRI contrast. Allergic reaction from gadolinium dye is extremely rare (less than 1%). Your doctor will review a list of possible complications. These may include: rash, hives, or shortness of breath. Notify the technologist immediately if you experience any discomfort.

What to expect prior to exam

- There is usually very little preparation for an MRI exam. Take your daily medications as you normally would, unless instructed otherwise. For those exams with dietary restrictions, you will be notified of the requirements when scheduling.
- Typically you will be asked to arrive 15 minutes prior to the scheduled procedural time. However, in some cases, you may be asked to arrive an hour or two hours early. You will be notified of your arrival time when scheduling.
- You should wear comfortable clothing that does not have metal fasteners or metallic designs. Otherwise, you will be asked to change into a hospital gown. A locker will be supplied to secure your belongings.
- If you have any type of electronic implant, please bring the device card or other documents with the device information with you, as these devices must be documented to be sure they are safe before you can go into the MRI room.

What to expect the day of your exam

- You will be registered and asked to fill out the [MRI screening form](#). You can print this and fill it out ahead of time to bring with you.
- A health care professional will explain the test and answer any questions you may have.
- If your exam requires contrast, an IV will be started so the contrast can be administered during the exam.

- You will be required to lie still during the actual scanning, as MRI is extremely sensitive to motion and any movement will cause the images to be blurry, resulting in repeated scanning and longer time in the magnet. Depending on the body part that is being examined, you may be instructed to hold your breath for up to 30 seconds at a time.
- The magnet is permanently open on both ends. It is well lit and there is a fan for patient comfort. The part of the body being scanned will be placed in the middle of the magnet. There is a two-way intercom system for communication between patient and technologist.
- During the actual imaging, you will hear a loud intermittent banging noise. You will be provided with earplugs or headphones to minimize the noise during the procedure.
- If you have claustrophobia, your doctor may prescribe an oral medication for you to take for your MRI appointment. If this is the case, be sure you have a driver with you.
- The technologist will also provide you with an alarm button to alert the technologist of any discomfort you may experience at any point during the MRI exam.

What to expect after your exam

- If a contrast injection is performed, the IV is removed from the arm before you go home.
- If you received sedation, someone must drive you home.

How long will it take?

The exam is 45 minutes to one hour per body part. If you are given contrast it will add an additional 15-20 minutes. Total time you will be at the health care facility is one to two hours.