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Breast MRI Patient Information Sheet

What is a Breast MRI?

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) of the breast uses powerful magnets and radio waves to create detailed pictures of breast tissue. Unlike mammograms or ultrasounds, breast MRI does not use radiation and can detect very small areas of abnormal tissue, and gives information on tissue behaviour, as well as appearance.

Why might you need a Breast MRI?

Your doctor may recommend a breast MRI to:

- Investigate unclear findings from other imaging tests such as mammogram and ultrasound
- Screen for breast cancer in high-risk patients
- Evaluate the extent of known breast cancer
- Monitor treatment response
- Check for cancer recurrence
- Assess breast implants for complications (most sensitive test for implant rupture)

Before Your Appointment

Important preparation steps:

- Schedule your exam for days 6-16 of your menstrual cycle (if pre-menopausal)
 - This may vary depending on your cycle length
- Inform staff if you might be pregnant
- List all medications, especially blood thinners
- Report any kidney problems or previous allergic reactions to contrast
- Remove all metal objects (jewellery, piercings, hearing aids)
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing

You cannot have an MRI if you have:

- Pacemaker or defibrillator
- Cochlear implants
- Certain metal implants or fragments
- Severe claustrophobia (discuss sedation options with your doctor)

What to Expect During the Exam

Duration: 30-60 minutes

The procedure:

1. You'll change into a hospital gown
2. An IV line will be placed in your arm for contrast injection
3. You'll lie face down on a padded table with openings for your breasts
4. The table slides into the MRI machine feet first (a large, tube-shaped scanner)
5. You'll hear loud knocking and tapping sounds during scanning
6. Contrast dye is injected halfway through the exam
7. You must remain very still throughout the procedure

Comfort measures:

- Earplugs or headphones are provided
- A communication device allows you to speak with the radiographer
- The room is well-lit and has good air circulation

After Your Exam

- You can resume normal activities immediately
- Drink plenty of water to help flush the contrast from your system
- The IV site may be slightly tender for a day or two
- Results are typically available within 24-48 hours
- Your doctor will discuss the findings with you

Risks and Side Effects

Breast MRI is generally very safe. Rare risks include:

- Allergic reaction to contrast dye (less than 1% of patients)
- Kidney problems from contrast (very rare with normal kidney function)
- Discomfort from lying still in a confined space

Questions?

If you have concerns about your upcoming breast MRI or need to reschedule, please contact your doctor or the imaging centre. Don't hesitate to ask about any medications you're taking or health conditions you have that might affect the exam.