TEST

Abdominal MRI scan

An abdominal MRI scan is an imaging test that uses magnets and radio waves to create detailed pictures of the organs in your belly.

WHAT IT MEASURES
Detailed images of abdominal organs and tissues

SAMPLE
None needed

FASTING NEEDED?
Sometimes if instructed before the scan

HOW LONG IT TAKES
30 to 60 minutes

USED FOR
Diagnosis and monitoring

MAIN LIMITATION
Motion can blur the images

Overview

An abdominal MRI scan is an imaging test that creates detailed pictures of the organs in your abdomen (your belly). It uses a strong magnet and radio waves, so it does not use X-ray radiation.

An MRI scan itself doesn't have a "prognosis." Its purpose is to answer a specific clinical question-such as whether organs look normal or whether a particular area needs more evaluation.

Depending on why the test was ordered, the scan may cover the whole abdomen or focus on a specific region. Often, it includes a contrast medicine (commonly called "contrast") to help certain tissues show up more clearly.

How to prepare

Preparation depends on the specific MRI order and whether contrast will be used. Always follow the imaging center's instructions.

In general, you may be asked to:

If you feel anxious in enclosed spaces, tell the team ahead of time. They can often offer comfort measures.

- Remove metal objects (jewelry, hair clips, watches) and sometimes removable body piercings
- Tell the team about any metal in your body (for example, surgical clips, metal fragments, or devices)
- Complete screening questions about implanted devices and any past metal work for safety
- Share your kidney history if contrast is planned, because kidney function can affect how contrast is handled
- Avoid eating for a period before the scan if you were instructed to fast
- Plan for the noise-MRI machines are loud, and ear protection is usually provided

What happens during the test

The scan is performed in an MRI room using a large scanner (a tunnel-like opening).

Many abdominal MRI exams take about 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the protocol. Tell the staff promptly if you feel very unwell, unusually uncomfortable, or unable to stay still.

- You lie on a table that slides into the scanner.
- Straps or padding may be used to help you stay still.
- You may be asked to hold your breath briefly at certain times to reduce blur from movement.
- The scanner makes loud clicking or tapping noises; ear protection is typically provided.
- If contrast is planned, an IV line may be placed, contrast is injected during the scan, and additional images may be taken afterward.

Understanding your results

Results are usually provided as a radiology report. The wording can be technical, and may include phrases such as "no acute abnormality," "no suspicious lesion," or "findings are indeterminate," depending on what the radiologist sees.

Keep in mind:

If any wording is unclear, ask for plain-language clarification about:

- "Normal" vs "abnormal" can depend on your age, sex, pregnancy status, medications, and overall clinical context.
- Report language can vary based on the imaging protocol and the radiologist's approach.
- MRI findings are interpreted alongside your symptoms, exam, and other tests.
- What the report thinks is happening (and what it cannot determine)
- Whether follow-up imaging, a different test, or observation is recommended
- The expected timing for the next step

Sources

- RadiologyInfo.org (RSNA/ACR): Patient information on MRI safety and MRI basics, including noise, metal screening, and what to expect.
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA): Public information on MRI safety and guidance related to gadolinium-based contrast agents.
- American College of Radiology (ACR): Manual on Contrast Media (general information on gadolinium-based contrast considerations and safety principles).
- National Health Service (NHS): Patient guidance on MRI scans, including preparation and aftercare.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): General information on MRI safety considerations regarding implants and metal (context for MRI screening).
- American College of Radiology (ACR): Patient-focused guidance on MRI procedures and what the report may include.