

Breast MRI

Benefits vs. Risks

Benefits

- MRI is a noninvasive imaging technique that does not involve exposure to ionizing radiation.
- MRI has proven valuable in detecting and staging breast cancer, particularly when other imaging studies (mammography, ultrasound, etc.) fail to provide adequate information.
- MRI as an addition to mammography has been shown to be useful in evaluating women at high risk for breast cancer.
- MRI can successfully image the dense breast tissue common in younger women, and it can successfully image breast implants. Both of these are difficult to image using traditional mammography.
- If a suspicious lesion is seen with MRI only, MRI can provide guidance for biopsy.
- The contrast material used in MRI exams is less likely to produce an allergic reaction than the iodine-based contrast materials used for conventional x-rays and CT scanning.

Risks

- The MRI examination poses almost no risk to the average patient when appropriate safety guidelines are followed.
- If sedation is used, there are risks of excessive sedation. The Technologist or nurse monitors your vital signs to minimize this risk.
- Although the strong magnetic field is not harmful in itself, implanted medical devices that contain metal may malfunction or cause problems during an MRI exam.
- There is a very slight risk of an allergic reaction if contrast material is injected. Such reactions usually are mild and easily controlled by medication. If you experience allergic symptoms, a radiologist or other physician will be available for immediate assistance.
- Nephrogenic systemic fibrosis is currently a recognized, but rare, complication of MRI believed to be caused by the injection of high doses of gadolinium-based contrast material in patients with very poor kidney function. Careful assessment of kidney function before considering a contrast injection minimizes the risk of this very rare complication.
- Manufacturers of intravenous contrast indicate mothers should not breastfeed their babies for 24-48 hours after contrast medium is given. Check with your Physician for instructions.