

Having a lymphatic scan

Your doctor has recommended that you have a lymphatic scan - this is a nuclear medicine test. A scan of your swollen limb is taken to help your doctor find out if there are any problems with fluid drainage.

What is nuclear medicine?

Nuclear medicine helps doctors to check how well different parts of your body are working. A small amount of a radioactive substance (tracer) is given, usually by injection into a vein. The tracer gives off gamma rays so we can measure the distribution of that tracer in your body. This measurement is usually done using a gamma camera, although occasionally blood samples may be needed.

Is there any risk from the radiation?

We will expose you to ionising radiation when we carry out this examination. We are all exposed to ionising radiation from naturally occurring sources such as cosmic rays, certain types of soil and rocks and even food we eat. Ionising radiation can cause cell damage that in turn, after many years, may turn cancerous. The radiation associated with your exam will therefore carry an extremely small risk which is less than 0.001%. This risk will be far outweighed by the benefits of having this exposure.

Please read the *Important points* section below. If you have any concerns, please contact us.

What preparation do I need for my lymphatic scan?

There is no special preparation for your scan. You can eat and drink as usual. You can continue to take any medication that has been prescribed for you by your doctor. It is also safe for you to take 'over the counter' medicines. However, if you normally wear an elastic stocking/bandage over the affected area, this should be removed three to four hours before your appointment.

How is my lymphatic scan carried out?

On arrival at the department, you will be given an injection of a radioactive tracer into the affected area. Scans of your swollen limb are taken at regular intervals for the next 90 minutes. This is to show how efficiently the lymphatic system is working.

For the scan, we will ask you to lie on the scanning couch while it moves slowly through the scanner. You will need to take off your shoes and remove jewellery and metal items from your pockets. There is no need to take off your clothes for the scan, but if any of your clothing has metal studs or buttons, you may be asked to remove it.



Are there any side effects?

The tracer that we inject will not produce any side effects. You can continue with your usual daily activities. In particular, it will not make you drowsy and so will not prevent you from driving a car.

What happens after my lymphatic scan?

Once your lymphatic scan is completed you may leave the department immediately. You will be able to eat and drink what you like. You may go anywhere you wish but you should avoid prolonged close contact with children for the rest of the day. This is to avoid exposing children to unnecessary radiation.

How will I get the result of my lymphatic scan?

Your lymphatic scan will be reported by the nuclear medicine consultant within 48 hours of completion. The results of your test will then be made available to the doctor who referred you.

Important points

- Due to the nature of these investigations, we advise that **you should not be accompanied by anyone who is pregnant and should not bring young children to the department**. With most of these investigations, the level of radioactivity will have decreased to a safe level by the time you arrive home after the scan. However, some investigations need more specific restrictions with regards to contact with young children - these will be explained.
- We are committed to ensuring patients are free from discrimination regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. If your gender was female at birth and you are transgender or non-binary, please inform a member of staff as we legally need to rule out the possibility of pregnancy before we can go ahead with some of our examinations. This information will not be recorded or shared without your consent.
- If you are afraid of needles, you can ask for a spray to numb the area, before your injection.
- If you are **pregnant or breastfeeding**, please contact the department as soon as possible to find out if you can have this test. Generally, nuclear medicine tests are not carried out on pregnant individuals unless absolutely necessary and then the dose of radioactivity will probably be reduced.

Contact details

If you have any queries, please contact us:

The Nuclear Medicine Team

Sutton

Tel: 020 8661 3762 / 3286

Chelsea

Tel: 020 7811 8541

Email: rmh-tr.rmuclearmedicine@nhs.net

Alternatively, please contact:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899
(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

