

The ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

Having a thyroid scan

Nuclear Medicine

Patient Information



Introduction

Your doctor has recommended that you have a thyroid scan. This is a nuclear medicine test. Scans of your neck are taken to help your doctor determine whether there are any problems associated with your thyroid.

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 a very small risk which is less than 0.01%. This risk will be far outweighed by the benefits of having this exposure. We will also tailor the amount of radiation we use to you.

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

What preparation do I need for my thyroid scan?

Medicines – If you are taking carbimazole or propylthiouracil tablets, then please continue to take these as usual. If you are taking thyroxine or tri-iodothyronine then please contact the Nuclear Medicine Department when you receive this appointment.

You can continue to take any other medication that has been prescribed for you by your doctor. It is also safe for you to take 'over the counter' medicines. If you are unsure as to whether you can take a specific medication, please call us.

You can eat and drink as usual on the day of your scan.

How is my thyroid scan carried out?

When you arrive at the department, we will give you a small injection of radioactive tracer into a vein. This will collect in your thyroid gland in about 20–30 minutes.

We will then take you into the scanning room where we will take a scan of your thyroid gland. The scan will take about 30 minutes. We will ask you 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 need 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. It will not make you drowsy and so will not prevent you from driving a car.

What happens after my thyroid scan?

Once your thyroid scan is completed you may leave the department immediately. You will be able to eat and drink as normal and resume all your usual medication. You may go anywhere you wish but you should avoid prolonged close contact with children and pregnant individuals for the rest of the day. This is to avoid exposing children to unnecessary radiation.

How will I get the result of my thyroid scan?

Your thyroid scan will be reported on 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 and these will be explained.
- If you are afraid of needles, you can ask for a spray to numb the area before your injection. Please call the Nuclear Medicine Department if you would like to request this.
- 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 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 us

If you have any queries, please contact us:

Sutton 020 8661 3286 / 3287

Chelsea 020 7811 8541

Email rmh-tr.rmuclearmedicine@nhs.net

Alternatively, please call:

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Telephone: Chelsea 020 7811 8438 / 020 7808 2083

Sutton 020 8661 3759 / 3951

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

No conflicts of interest were declared in the production of this booklet.

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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