

The ROYAL MARSDEN

NHS Foundation Trust

Coping with Scanxiety

Adult Psychological Support Service

Patient Information



NHS

Introduction

Scanxiety or scan anxiety describes the fear or worry that you may feel about having a scan or waiting for the results. It is completely understandable and a common experience for many patients. For some, scanxiety is related to thoughts of uncertainty and might be heightened by concern from family and friends. You may experience it for every scan or just some. Scanxiety can happen before the scan, during the scan, or after the scan and below are some techniques you can try to help you feel less anxious.



Before your scan

- Find out what type of scan it will be and how long it is likely to take. There are different types of scans such as a CT or MRI. Some are noisy and some are quiet. During a scan you may be alone.
- Speak to staff at The Royal Marsden about any specific concerns you have eg what will be best to wear to make sure you are comfortable.
- Make a plan for the day eg how you will get to the hospital, find the scanning room, and who will go with you.

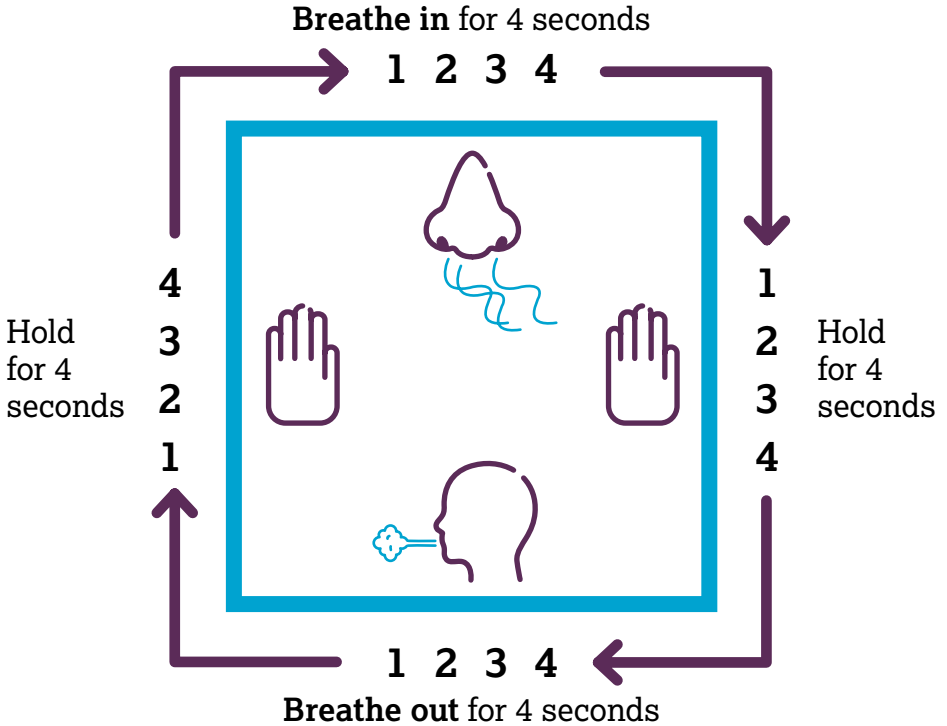
- Think about music, meditation, or podcasts you might like to listen to during your scan and communicate this to staff.
- During your scan you might be able to hold something that brings you comfort or can be a type of distraction so think about what this could be.



During your scan

- If you forget your own music etc, you can speak with the radiographer. They sometimes have the radio on, and they can talk to you during the scan to ensure you are comfortable.
- You can ask to wear an eye mask and ear plugs to distract you from the noise and surroundings.
- Do something to distract yourself. Try closing your eyes and picturing your happy place.
- Try an exercise called mindfulness which might help you feel more settled. There are some mindfulness apps such as 'Calm' or 'Headspace' or there are lots of exercises on YouTube.
- Try some breathing exercises eg square breathing. Look for something in the shape of a square or imagine a square in your mind. Breathe in for four, hold for four, breathe out for four, and hold for four.

Square breathing



After your scan

- Ask your medical team when you are likely to get your results and how you will get them eg by phone or in person.
- Think about who you might want to be with you when you get the results.
- Treat yourself after the scan eg see a friend, get yourself something nice, or do something you enjoy.
- Get in contact with your clinical team if you think the results are taking a long time.



How to manage your anxiety

Managing anxiety is not about trying to get rid of an emotion but working with it.

Use the worry tree below to work out if your worry can be problem-solved or if you need to let the worry go:

Worry Tree



Worry Time

It is completely understandable to experience anxiety but sometimes people struggle with the thoughts of uncertainty and feel like the worry is taking over, leaving little space for anything else. If you feel this way, it might be helpful to introduce 'Worry Time'. The aim is to increase 'worry free time' so that your day is not filled with worrying.

- Set aside a regular time in the day when you can focus on your worries (eg 15 minutes before dinner time; try not to set this time too close to bedtime). When worries come up during the rest of the day, make a brief note of them (on paper or on your phone) and tell yourself that you will come back to them at Worry Time. Now carry on doing what you were doing before you noticed you were worrying.
- When Worry Time arrives, get out your list of worries and go through them. If some of the worries are no longer bothering you, then move on to others that do.
- Once Worry Time has finished (and do stick to the time slot), screw up the piece of paper with the worries on and put it in the recycling bin, or delete the notes you have made on your phone.
- If you forget to do Worry Time that's okay, just remember to postpone future worries until Worry Time comes around the next day (don't be tempted to have an extra Worry Time).
- It can feel strange to worry on purpose for a set amount of time, but knowing you have this time set aside can make it easier to let go of worries in the meantime. It can also reduce the amount of time you spend worrying during the rest of the day.

Further information

If you would like further advice on coping with anxiety and worries, other information sheets are available from The Royal Marsden patient information library:

<https://patientinfolibrary.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/>

You may also want to visit one of the following websites:

Macmillan

www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/anxiety

Maggie's

www.maggies.org/about-us/blog/tips-for-managing-scanxiety/

Contact details

The Royal Marsden's Adult Psychological Support Service offers short-term, cancer-specific psychological and psychiatric support. This includes psycho-sexual therapy and, family and couples therapy. You can either self-refer or ask somebody in your Royal Marsden healthcare team to refer you.

For more information, visit this website

www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/your-care/adult-support-services/adult-psychological-support-service

Alternatively, contact us directly on:

Chelsea 020 7808 2777

Sutton 020 8661 3006

If you need any specialist and personalised advice about your cancer treatment, please contact:

The Royal Marsden Hotline 020 8915 6899

(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Notes and questions

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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

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



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