

MRI for Breast Cancer

Breast MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan is an imaging test that uses powerful magnets and radio waves to create pictures of the breast. It does not use radiation (X-RAY). A breast MRI is not a replacement for mammography. It may be done in addition to mammography. The MRI machine is a large, tube-shaped machine that creates a strong magnetic field around the patient.

For a breast MRI, the woman lies face down, with her breasts positioned through openings in the table. A breast MRI requires the use of contrast. The contrast is injected into a vein in the arm during the procedure and creates clearer images.

Reasons to order MRI

MRI provides detailed pictures of the breast and can provide information different from mammography and ultrasound. Once breast cancer is discovered, your doctor may order an MRI for several different reasons:

- **To find additional cancers in the breast where the cancer is first detected.** MRI can find additional disease in about 16% of women who have this test before surgery.
- **To detect cancer in the opposite breast.** MRI will find cancer in the other breast about 3 to 5% of the time even when a mammogram or clinical exam is normal.
- **To look for cancer in the breasts of a woman found to have a cancerous axillary (armpit) lymph node.** If a mammogram does not identify any cancer within the breast, MRI can help.
- **To help with the most effective treatment plan possible.** Information from the MRI helps the surgeon determine best surgical option and helps the oncologist to determine if the patient needs chemotherapy before surgery.