

Let's talk about...

Preparing A Child for an MRI Without Anesthesia

An MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan uses magnets and radio waves to create detailed pictures of the inside of the body. This process does not use radiation. Please use the information below to prepare your child for what to expect.

Preparation tips:

- When sharing information, aim to stay open, honest, and as clear as possible.
- Prepare younger children for the MRI closer to the scheduled appointment (1-2 days before). Prepare older children at least one week before, so they have time to process and ask questions.
- Share information about what the child will experience related to their senses – what they will see, hear, and feel.
- For younger children, it is helpful to have them practice lying still at home. During these practice sessions, add in an example of what an MRI machine can sound like: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Utmvj30xJvY>. This is a great time to talk about coping ideas: imagining their favorite place, closing their eyes, etc.
- When possible, a Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) will call you before the appointment to answer questions, provide specific information, and develop a plan. A CCLS will also be available to provide support during the MRI appointment.



What will you see:

- You will meet an MRI technologist. This person knows a lot about the MRI process and can answer any questions you may have.
- You will see an MRI machine that looks like the picture above. Some children say this looks like a donut, train tunnel, or spaceship; what do you think it looks like?

What you will hear:

- The MRI machine can be loud and will make knocking and clicking sounds during the scan. They will give you ear plugs to make it less noisy.

For more information or to connect with a Child Life Specialist, please visit: <http://ucdavis.health/childlife>

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What you will feel:

- When the MRI begins, you will feel the bed move into the scanner where the camera will be taking your pictures.
- Sometimes children need contrast (“picture water”), so the images are clearer for the radiologist. In most cases, contrast is given through an IV (intravenous line). An IV is a soft flexible tube placed inside a vein.

Other information:

- Your child will need to be able to stay still for 30 to 90 minutes, depending on the type of scan.
- Movie goggles *may* be available for the child to use during the scan. This can help coping and will be offered by the MRI team, as appropriate.
- We *encourage* a parent to stay in the MRI room during a child's scan. The MRI team screens everyone for safety beforehand as metal and pacemakers (etc.) are not allowed in the MRI area.

To contact a Child Life Specialist
in Radiology, please email:
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