

MRI Scan under Sedation or General Anaesthetic

Information for parents and/or caregivers

What is MRI under sedation?

While most imaging exams are quick and painless, paediatric patients sometimes need sedation to remain still and follow instructions throughout the MRI scan.

How much sedation your child requires will vary according to the scan required. It also depends on their age and developmental level, how much discomfort is expected and the advice of your paediatrician who ordered the test.

Why does my child need sedating?

MRI can be very scary for a child because it is noisy (please see MRI fact sheet for further information) It also involves lying still. Some children cannot remain still for an MRI scan and need sedation to help them relax or sleep during the exam.

How should I prepare my child for an imaging test or treatment with sedation?

Preventing a young child from eating can be a challenge. Unless otherwise instructed, you can help ease your child's feeling of an empty stomach with clear liquids up until two hours prior to the procedure. You will be given specific fasting times prior to your child's procedure.

Before the exam, try to keep your child away from others who are eating and make sure siblings do not share food with them.

A child can be given prescription drugs while they are still allowed to take clear liquids. Do not give a child medication with solid foods, including apple sauce and pudding. Medications that are to be taken later in the day may be given after the procedure and your child has recovered from the sedation.

Parents are strongly encouraged to eat and drink prior to arriving at the imaging facility. The entire process—from admission to discharge—can be physically draining.

Inform your doctor if your child is sick or has cold or flu symptoms, such as a cough, runny nose or fever. Sedation may not be safe when a child is sick with these symptoms. The procedure may need to be rescheduled.

Your child may be asked to remove their clothing and wear a gown during the exam. They may also be asked to remove jewellery, eyeglasses, any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the x-ray images.

General anaesthetic/sedation

The medicine used for the anaesthetic is active in your body for 24 hours after your procedure so your child may:

- Feel drowsy
- Dizzy or light headed
- Experience some muscle soreness
- Headache
- Throat irritation

These side effects are usually mild, brief and treatable.

Nausea and vomiting

Feeling sick and/or vomiting is common after an anaesthetic or taking pain medication, even after you go home. If this happens to your child when you go home, get your child to drink only water and try eating toast.

If you continue to feel sick and vomit you need to visit your local doctor for review. If continuing sickness and vomiting happens within 24 hours of your discharge, please go to the FMC Emergency Department.

What will my child experience during and after the procedure?

During the procedure

All patients who receive anaesthesia are attached to special devices that monitor heart rate and other vital body functions. Children who receive general anaesthesia will be unconscious for the entire procedure under the direct care of anaesthesia professional.

Sedatives are usually administered to children through a peripheral IV catheter. They may feel slight pressure or a sharp pinch when the catheter is inserted. Some children younger than two years old occasionally can be sedated with oral medications.

Children undergoing MRI will be watched on a camera in the MRI scanner. Imaging staff will report any movement to the anaesthesia provider, in which case additional sedation may be needed.

After the procedure

Children who received minimal or moderate sedation should be able to go home shortly after the procedure. Those who receive deep sedation or general anaesthesia will be required to remain under the care of the department nurse until they have recovered properly.

Children respond differently to sedatives and anaesthesia. Some children may become agitated, inconsolable or restless during or after sedation. Other children may continue to be sleepy and unsteady on their feet for the remainder of the day.

Most paediatric patients are able to resume their normal activity within six to eight hours. However, children should be monitored by a responsible adult for 12 to 24 hours after being sedated. Activities that require coordination and balance, such as swimming, climbing and riding a bike, should usually be delayed by 24 hours.

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For more information

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