Having a Gadolinium based contrast agent for MRI while breastfeeding

This leaflet is intended for use by patients who have been referred for an MRI scan requiring contrast and are currently breastfeeding. Further information about the medicine is available in the manufacturer's patient information leaflet or in the Trust patient information sheet, 'Gadolinium based contrast agent (injection) for MRI Scanning' – please ask us if you would like a copy of either of these.

If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a Gadolinium based contrast agent?

Gadolinium based contrast agent (GBCA) is a clear colourless fluid that is used like a dye to make the MRI images clearer. This may help with diagnosis. A radiologist (a specialist doctor trained in studying medical images, such as MRI and X-rays) or a senior radiographer (a specially trained member of the radiology team who performs the MRI scan) will decide if you need a GBCA and discuss this with you.

What are the risks?

New evidence has found that 'a very small percentage of the injected dose of GBCA enters the breast milk and virtually none is absorbed across the normal gut' [1]. The American College of Radiology updated their guidelines in 2023, which state that 'less than 0.04% of the dose given to the mother is excreted into the breast milk in the first 24 hours [2].

Because less than 1% of the contrast ingested by the infant is absorbed from its gastrointestinal tract, the expected amount absorbed by the infant from the breast milk is less than 0.0004% of the dose given to the mother [2]'. In reality, this means that the amount that could be absorbed by the baby is far less than the amount we would give them should they themselves require an MRI scan with GBCA.

The way we work has been updated to reflect new research and guidelines from the Royal College of Radiologists. This mentions that while no special precaution or pause in breastfeeding is required, the continuation or pause in breastfeeding for 24 hours should be at the discretion of the breastfeeding patient in consultation with the clinician [1,3].

It is your choice whether you stop breastfeeding. The evidence suggests that there is no need to discontinue breastfeeding after a GBCA has been given or to pump to remove milk [4]. If you do decide to stop breastfeeding after being given a GBCA, it is

suggested that you only stop for 12-24 hours, 'there is no value to stop breastfeeding beyond 24 hours' [4].

For full information on all risks and side effects of having a GBCA please ask a radiographer for the related patient information sheet 'Gadolinium based contrast agent (injection) for MRI Scanning', which is available on the Trust website: MRI_GAD.pdf

Are there any alternatives?

Unfortunately, there are no other alternatives to GBCA and the decision of whether to have a GBCA is your own and will not affect the standard of your care. However, it may mean that the radiologist looking at your images cannot be as certain or specific about any future treatment or diagnosis.

Asking for your consent

If you decide to go ahead with having contrast, by law we must ask for your consent. This confirms that you understand what the procedure involves and agree to have it. Staff will explain all the risks, benefits and alternatives before they ask you to consent to having contrast. If you are unsure, please do not hesitate to speak with a member of staff caring for you. Additional patient information sheets regarding GBCA and MRI scanning in general are also available.

Useful sources of information

Patient Information Sheet – MRI Scanning with Gadolinium based contrast agent injection MRI_GAD.pdf

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about Gadolinium based contrast agent, please contact the MRI department on 020 8725 3021 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm). Out of hours, please contact your GP or go to your local emergency (A&E) department for advice.

References

Information in this leaflet was acquired from:

[1] RCR Clinical Radiology: The Royal College of Radiologists 2019. Guidance on gadolinium-based contrast agent administration to adult patients.

[2] ACR The American College of Radiology 2024. ACR Manual of Contrast Media, ASR Committee on Drugs and Contrast Media.

[3] Safety Guidelines for Magnetic Resonance Imaging Equipment in Clinical Use (2022) Magnetic resonance imaging equipment in clinical use: safety guidelines. Available at: MHRA

[4] The Breastfeeding Network MRI Scans and Breastfeeding.pdf

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Was this information helpful? Yes / No

Please let us know, contact patient.information@stgeorges.nhs.uk and include the leaflet title.
Thank you.

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:
Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm
Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings.

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. **Tel:** 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.