

Having an x-ray

This leaflet explains more about having an x-ray, including the benefits, risks and any alternatives. It also provides information on what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions, please speak to your doctor or radiographer.

What is an x-ray?

X-rays are similar to light, except that they have a much higher frequency which makes them invisible to the naked eye. An x-ray is a widely used diagnostic test, to examine the inside of the body by creating an image much like a photograph. An x-ray is very quick and often no appointment is needed. It is often the first point of investigation to help the doctor decide if any other forms of imaging or tests are needed.

Why should I have an x-ray?

An x-ray can give information that leads to, or helps make a diagnosis about your medical condition. X-rays can also be used to monitor an existing condition. It will be your doctor, or sometimes a nurse, who decides that you might benefit from having an x-ray.

What are the risks?

X-rays are of a type of radiation known as ionising radiation. The dose that you get from a medical x-ray is very low and the associated risks are minimal. They are similar in strength to other sources of natural radiation that people are exposed to everyday without even realising it. The radiographer is responsible for making sure that your dose is kept as low as possible. Each x-ray request will be checked by the radiographer to make sure that it is properly justified and necessary so that the benefits of having the x-ray outweigh any risk.

Female patients

Radiation can be harmful for an unborn baby. **If you are, or think you may be pregnant you must tell the radiographer before the x-ray.** For some examinations the radiographer may check your pregnancy status with you before the x-ray.

How can I prepare for an x-ray?

Generally there are no preparations needed prior to attending for your x-ray (like fasting or drinking water for example). However, wear comfortable clothing. Items with metallic zips, buttons and fasteners show on x-rays and you may be asked to remove them and/or change into a hospital gown. Other items that may need to be removed include glittery/stick on studs on clothing,

INFORMATION SHEET

jewellery, dentures, glasses or other objects that may interfere with the images. The items that need to be removed will depend on the type of examination being performed.

Relatives and escorts: You may bring a friend or relative with you to the x-ray department when you have your x-rays, however, they will be asked to stay in the waiting room. Occasionally you may be able to bring someone with you to the room for interpretation purposes or for disability assistance.

Children: Unfortunately we are unable to offer childcare facilities. If you need to bring your children with you, please bring along an adult who can supervise them in the waiting area while your examination is being done.

If you have any medical problem which you feel may affect your safety in the department, or if you feel you may need any assistance, please let us know when you arrive.

Giving my consent (permission)

The radiographer will ask you if you are happy for the x-ray to go ahead. This is a form of verbal consent and may only involve the radiographer checking your ID and if you are booked for the correct x-ray. If you do not wish to have the x-ray or are undecided, please ask the radiographer so that they can answer any questions you may have.

Remember, it is your decision. You can change your mind at any time and your wishes will be respected. However, not having the x-ray may delay your diagnosis as the doctors may not have all the needed information.

What happens during an x-ray?

Your x-ray will be performed by a radiographer. The radiographer will ask you to confirm some details, including your identity. There are many different x-ray examinations and depending on your particular examination you may be asked to remove certain items of clothing (or change into a hospital gown) and jewellery.

Some x-ray examinations require the use of different equipment in different rooms. It may, therefore, seem as though some patients go in ahead of turn, but this is not the case. Once in the room you may be asked to lie down on the x-ray table, stand next to a board, or take a seat at a table. You will then be asked to move into different positions in order to take the x-ray.

Will I feel any pain?

You cannot feel x-rays and so the procedure itself is painless. However, it is important for the radiographer to get you into the correct position for different images. Holding this position or lying on the x-ray table may, for some people, feel uncomfortable, but for the majority of patients this is not the case.

INFORMATION SHEET

What happens after an x-ray?

The radiographer may ask you to wait in the department while they check that no more x-rays are required. As soon as the radiographer is satisfied that no more x-rays are needed, you will be free to leave the department or will be escorted back to the ward you presented from.

When will I get the results?

Your x-ray pictures will be studied by a radiologist (a doctor who uses x-rays to diagnose and treat illnesses) and the results will be sent to the doctor who referred you.

The radiographer will tell you how to get your results and how long it will take, as this may be slightly different for each patient, generally within 3-5 working days. You may already have an appointment with the doctor who referred you. If not, please contact them to arrange a time to talk about the results and any treatment you may need.

If you are staying in hospital, the results will be given to the doctors looking after you on the ward.

If you have not heard from your GP within 7 days, please contact them directly.

What should I do if I have a problem?

You should not have any problem that is a result of the x-ray. If you feel your condition has changed, or you need further medical advice before receiving your results, please make an appointment with the doctor that referred you, or in an emergency, go to your local injuries unit (LIU) or accident and emergency (A&E) department.

Contact us: If you have any questions or concerns about coming for your x-ray, please contact the x-ray reception on: 01 211-5020 or email (radiology.stch@hse.ie) (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).