

Myelogram

What is a myelogram?

A myelogram is an x-ray examination of your spinal cord and the nerves from your spinal cord. There is fluid-filled space around the spinal cord. A fine needle is inserted into this space and the doctor injects contrast (dye). The needle is then removed and a series of x-rays are taken of your spine. You may be asked to adopt different positions, such as lying on your back and then on your side.

Why do I need a myelogram?

Other investigations such as: plain x-rays, MRI scans and CT scans are likely to have been performed and are inconclusive. This test is designed to identify the cause of any pain or symptoms due to something pressing on a nerve root.

Who has made the decision?

The consultant team and/or specialist physiotherapist in charge of your case will have referred you on to the radiologist carrying out your myelogram. If after discussion with the radiologist you decide you do not want the test you can decide against it.

What are the alternatives?

Plain x-rays, MRI scans and CT scans as mentioned are likely to have been performed and have not identified the cause of your symptoms.

If you have a pacemaker you would not be able to have an MRI scan, a myelogram can be offered as an alternative.

Who will be performing the myelogram?

The test is carried out by a radiologist (a doctor who specialises in x-ray procedures). The radiologist will explain the test to you before they start and answer any questions you may have.

The x-ray equipment is operated by a radiographer. A Radiology Nurse or Health Care Assistant will also be present during the procedure. These members of staff will introduce themselves at the start of the examination.

Occasionally student radiographers or medical students will be present to observe the procedure.

Where will it take place?

In a fluoroscopy room in the Medical Imaging Department.

How do I prepare for a myelogram?

- Myelography can be performed as an outpatient / day case.
- You will have had some blood tests performed before the procedure to check that you do not have an increased risk of bleeding.
- You are asked not to eat for 4 hours prior to the procedure. You may drink a little water.
- You will need someone to drive you home and to look after you for 24 hours.
- You should be prepared to stay overnight if necessary.

- If you have any allergies or you have previously reacted to intravenous contrast medium, you must let the doctor know. Intravenous contrast medium is the injection we give you during some scans.
- If you are diabetic, please contact the Medical Imaging Department on **01392 402336 selecting option 2, in-patient enquiries, option 7** X-ray Special Procedures.
- If you normally take any medication to thin your blood (anticoagulation or antiplatelet drugs) such as: **warfarin / clopidogrel / aspirin / non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS / brufen / ibrufen / nurofen) / dabigatran (Pradaxa) / rivaroxiban (Xarelto) / Apixaban (Eliquis) / phendione / acenocoumarol** – then these may need to be stopped or altered. Please contact the Medical Imaging Department on **01392 402336 selecting option 2, in-patient enquiries and then option 7** for X-ray Special Procedures.
- Other medication should be taken as normal.

What actually happens during a myelogram?

You will be asked to lie on an x-ray table. The skin on your lower back will be cleaned and local anaesthetic will be used to numb the area. Using the x-ray machine for guidance an injection is then made around your spinal cord to outline the nerve roots. Once the needle is removed you will usually be moved into a standing position and further pictures taken of your spine and the nerve roots. You will then be transferred to the CT scanner for further imaging.

Is it painful?

You will be given local anaesthetic but may feel some discomfort when the needle is put in and the contrast injected. This discomfort will only last for 1 or 2 minutes. If you feel it is too uncomfortable then let the doctor know.

How long does it take?

A myelogram usually takes about 30 minutes to complete. You then have a CT scan afterwards, which will take at least another 15 minutes.

What happens afterwards?

- You will be taken to a comfortable chair for a cup of tea/coffee and we will monitor your blood pressure and pulse. You will need to stay in the department for 1 hour after the procedure.
- Do not do anything strenuous for 24 hours and do not go to work the following day.
- Do not drive for 24 hours post procedure.
- The contrast used for the test may cause headaches. It is important that you remain upright (or at least not lying flat) for at least 8 hours after the test as this helps the dye to disperse.
- If you do develop a headache take Paracetamol or your regular painkillers.
- **DRINK PLENTY OF FLUIDS FOR THE NEXT 24 HOURS** (not alcohol) this will help to flush the contrast from your system.
- If you feel unwell the following day, please contact your GP and inform them that you have had a myelogram.

What will happen to the results?

We aim to report examinations as soon as possible. The results will be sent to the consultant team and/or specialist physiotherapist who requested the scan to be done.

Are there any risks or complications?

Any adverse reaction to this procedure is rare. This is a small possibility of an allergic reaction to the contrast or other drugs used such as the local anaesthetic. If this occurs it will normally be immediate, but very rare.

There is a small chance of introducing infection. We take every precaution to avoid this by using WHO (World Health Organisation) approved aseptic techniques. There is a small risk of bleeding also.

Finally...

Some of your questions should have been answered by this leaflet, but remember that this is only a starting point for discussion about your treatment with the doctors looking after you. Make sure you are satisfied that you have received enough information about the procedure, before you sign the consent form.

Contact us

If you found reading this leaflet difficult, you do not understand what it means for you, if you have any queries or concerns you can contact us on: **01392 402336** and we can talk it through.

How to get to the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital at Wonford

Please refer to the enclosed "Welcome to the Medical Imaging Department" leaflet or use the Trusts website for the latest information:

www.rdehospital.nhs.uk/patients/where

For more information on the Medical Imaging Department, please visit our website:

www.rdehospital.nhs.uk/patients/services/medical-imaging

*This leaflet was modified with acknowledgment of,
and permission from, the Royal College of Radiologists*

The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

© Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust

Designed by Graphics (Print & Design), RD&E