



NUCLEAR MEDICINE

INFORMATION FOR COMFORTERS AND CARERS

WHAT IS NUCLEAR MEDICINE?

Nuclear medicine uses radioactive materials/isotopes to produce unique pictures of the body's inner workings i.e. how different organs are functioning. This allows diagnosis of diseases at very early stages. Nuclear Medicine injections therefore contain a small amount of radioactivity.

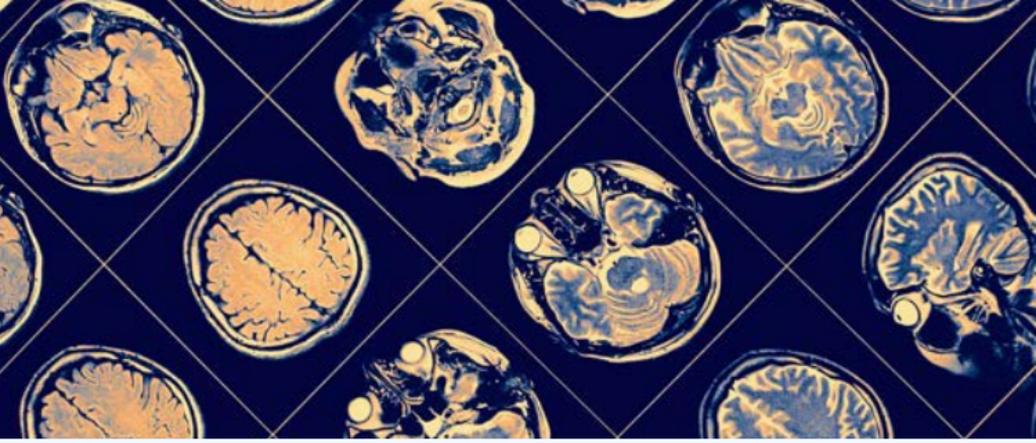
IS THE RADIATION DANGEROUS?

Exposure to large amounts of radiation can be harmful to the body e.g. people exposed to large amounts of radiation are more likely to develop some forms of cancer. There is no direct evidence that low exposures to radiation are harmful but it is considered sensible to limit exposures to the lowest amount possible. All staff involved in the medical exposure of patients are highly trained to ensure radiation dose is as low as reasonably achievable. It is the duty of Doctors who order scans, and Radiology staff who carry out the scans to ensure that the scans are justified. This means that staff must ensure that when scans are done, the benefits from making the right diagnosis and consequently giving you the right treatment outweigh any small risk involved.

If treatment decisions depend on findings, then the risk to patient health from not having the scan is likely to be much greater than that from the radiation itself.

WHY ARE PRECAUTIONS ADVISED AFTER NUCLEAR MEDICINE SCANS?

The injected radioactivity can remain in the patient's body anywhere from 24 to 72 hours depending on the isotope used. It is generally excreted from the body via the kidneys and urine. For this reason certain aftercare and precautions are recommended for the patient and people who come into close contact with the patient (i.e. people referred to as comforters and carers). The radiographer will inform you on the length of time precautions should be followed.



AFTERCARE FOR PATIENTS:

1. Patients should drink plenty of fluids and empty their bladder frequently. When using the toilet they should avoid spills, flush twice and wash their hands thoroughly.
2. Nursing mothers should express and discard breast milk for the length of time the radiographer advises and ideally arrange for someone to look after the baby for the rest of the day.

PRECAUTIONS

Even though the amount of radiation that comforters and carers might potentially be exposed to is very low, the following precautions are recommended:

1. The patient should avoid close contact over long periods with pregnant women and young babies. If possible they should avoid contact with pregnant ladies and babies for 24 hours.
2. Comforters and carers should avoid direct continuous contact with the patient, particularly in bed at night or in the case of a child sitting on your lap watching Television.
3. The patient should not undergo any non urgent investigations and treatments that would involve close contact with the patient for periods longer than 30 mins. Such treatments or examinations should be postponed for at least 6 hours and ideally 24 hours post injection.
4. The patient should not undergo Blood tests, urine samples and surgery - They should be postponed for at least 12 hours, preferably for 24 hours post injection. Clinical urgency, in exceptional circumstances may dictate otherwise.
5. Examination gloves and plastic aprons should be worn when handling urine bags, bottles, bedpans, dirty linen etc.



NUCLEAR MEDICINE

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

WHAT IS NUCLEAR MEDICINE?

Nuclear medicine uses radioactive materials/isotopes to produce unique pictures of the body's inner workings i.e. how different organs are functioning. This allows diagnosis of diseases at very early stages.

WHAT DO NUCLEAR MEDICINE SCANS INVOLVE?

1. Injection

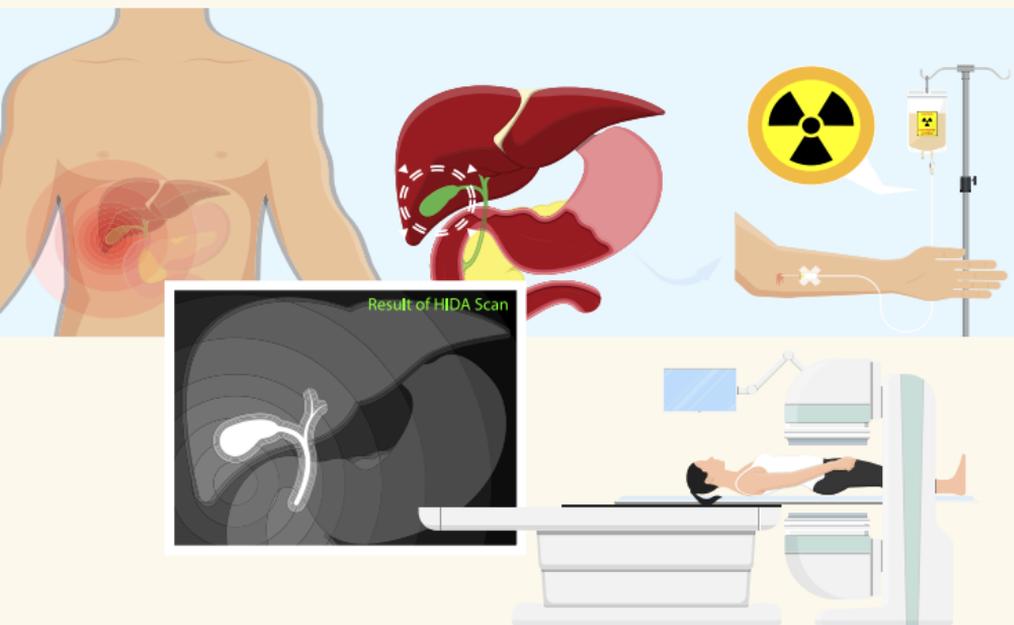
A nuclear medicine scan involves receiving an injection usually into a vein in the arm or hand. Different injections are used depending on which area of the body is being investigated.

2. Waiting Time

Once you receive your injection the radiographer will tell you when your scan will take place. Some scans take place immediately following the injection, other scans will be hours after the injection; depending on what part of the body is being investigated.

3. Scan

For the actual scan patients are usually asked to lie on their back and a scanning camera will be placed close to your body, but it won't touch you. It is very important that you stay still for the duration of the scan. Scans usually last between 5 to 30 mins approximately, depending on the part of the body being examined.



PRECAUTIONS/AFTERCARE

* NB FEMALE PATIENTS

If you are pregnant or there is a possibility that you are pregnant please tell us prior to your appointment/injection

**Pregnant women and young children/
babies should not come with the
patient to the Nuclear medicine Dept.**

The injection can remain in the body anywhere from 24 to 72 hours depending on the isotope used. The radiographer will inform you on the length of time precautions should be followed. Even though the amount of radiation is very small, you should take the following precautions during this period:

1. Drink plenty of fluids and empty your bladder frequently. When using the toilet you should avoid spills, flush twice and wash your hands thoroughly.
2. If possible avoid close contact over long periods with pregnant women and young babies.
3. If you are a nursing mother, express and discard breast milk for the length of time the radiographer advises.

The doctor will report on your scan and the report will be sent to your referring doctor, usually within 48 hours.