

What is prostate MRI?

Also referred to as multiparametric prostate MRI (mpMRI), prostate MRI is an imaging test designed to non-invasively detect—or rule out—prostate cancer in men.

In the past, men at elevated risk for prostate cancer received a prostate biopsy. However, the biopsy often missed cancer, and in other cases, led to the over-treatment of less-threatening cancers. With prostate MRI, doctors now have a tool that can view the entire prostate gland, distinguish between cancer and healthy tissue, and determine if another prostate condition (like prostatitis—an inflammation of the gland) is the cause of elevated PSA. If a biopsy is needed, MRI can help to ensure both the sampling, and the diagnosis, is accurate. For men without prostate cancer, MRI can help them avoid an unnecessary biopsy.

The American Urological Association now recommends prostate MRI as a front-line test to assess or rule out prostate cancer—before a biopsy is performed.

Prostate MRI at IHS

Not all centers that perform prostate MRI are equal. There are differences between the technology used, and the experience of the radiologists who read and interpret your test results.

IHS is the only radiology provider in greater San Diego to use restriction spectrum imaging (RSI). An FDA-cleared post-processing software, RSI supports improved detection of clinically significant prostate cancer. It has allowed IHS radiologists to distinguish between slow-growing (non-threatening) and more aggressive cancers, an essential factor that can influence the decision to either intervene or conduct active surveillance.

Supported by artificial intelligence and the skill/experience of the radiologist, this technology enables a faster and more accurate PI-RADS scoring. Our radiologists are among the most experienced in the nation at performing this test, have extensive experience working with regional urologists, and remain at the forefront of their field. Our reputation is such that patients from all over California travel to IHS for prostate MRI testing.

What should I expect?

The following are the steps you and/or your doctor will take before, during and after your prostate MRI examination.



1. Suspicion

Your doctors suspects you may have an issue with your prostate.



2. Referral

Your doctor refers you for a Prostate MRI at IHS.



3. Contact

IHS' referral coordinator will contact you to schedule a test.



4. Day of Test

You can choose contact-free check-in to avoid the lobby on the day of your test.



5. Results

Your test results, which includes images and a full report, will be shared with your doctor.



6. Discussion

You will discuss the finding with your doctor and determine next steps, if required.



7. Follow-Up

If a biopsy or follow-up test is recommended, IHS can remind you when it is time to make another appointment.

Here's a more in depth look into what you can expect during this process.

1. Your doctor suspects a prostate issue

You may have an elevated or rising PSA. You may have had an abnormal rectal examination. Or, your doctor may be looking at a combination of factors such as your family history, ethnicity, weight, age or other risk factors.

At this point, your doctor may recommend that you have a prostate MRI examination at Imaging Healthcare Specialists (IHS).

2. You receive a referral to IHS

If you and your doctor agree that a prostate MRI test is right for you, you will receive a referral from your doctor that is sent to our scheduling department. This means that your doctor has recommended this test to help determine if the prostate "issue" is caused by cancer, or if it is the result of a benign condition, such as an enlarged prostate (also called BPH) or prostatitis (inflammation).

3. You will be contacted by IHS Patient Concierge

When IHS receives the referral, our Patient Concierge will reach out to you by phone within 24-48 hours to schedule your prostate MRI examination. They will schedule your exam at a time that works for your schedule, inform you about how long the exam will take, and provide directions to which location your test will take place. Prior to your arrival, you will be given preparation instructions, along with a time to arrive at the center. As part of your preparation, you will be asked to purchase a bottle of magnesium citrate at your local pharmacy, which you will drink at 4 pm the day before your test. You will be asked to eat no food 6 hours prior to your appointment time, but you may drink plenty of water or Gatorade.

4. On the day of your appointment

If you choose contact-free check in, you will be contacted 2-3 hours prior to your test to fill out any forms that may be needed online. If you choose this option, you will bypass the waiting room and will be taken directly to the MRI suite. The test itself takes less than an hour. The technologist will inform you what to expect, and be in audio contact while you are inside the MRI machine. If you have any questions, the IHS radiologist will be on hand to answer them. The radiologist is a medical doctor specialized in diagnostic imaging who will consult with you and your doctor about your test results.

5. Test results

Your doctor will receive a detailed report with your prostate MRI findings. In some cases, the test will reveal no prostate cancer, and possibly identify another condition causing your prostate issue. Your doctor may recommend medication or lifestyle changes, and monitor biomarkers to help ensure that your PSA levels or risk factors are reduced. In some cases, it will reveal the presence of cancer. The radiologist may be able to assess the nature of the cancer and work with your doctor to determine if a prostate biopsy is needed.

6. Discussion with your doctor

After your prostate MRI, you will likely be called in for a consultation with your doctor. If a small cancer was found, you may be advised to take no action today but monitor the disease over time. If a more aggressive form of cancer is suspected, a biopsy will be recommended.

7. Follow-up testing

For men with slow-growing cancers, a strategy of "active surveillance" is often recommended. This means that your doctor does not think cancer treatment is needed at this time, but that your prostate gland should be monitored. You will likely have another prostate MRI at a prescribed interval—6, 12 or 24 months after your first MRI. By monitoring the progression, your doctor can assess changes in your prostate gland to help determine if treatment for prostate cancer is required.

If a biopsy is needed...

The images provided with your prostate MRI test results will help to make sure that your biopsy sample is taken from the most suspicious area(s) within the gland. Your biopsy will use imaging (ultrasound or MRI) to guide a very thin needle into the prostate gland, where samples will be removed and then sent to a laboratory for further evaluation. The results of the biopsy can help determine the best course of treatment for your individual condition.

Ultrasound-guided biopsies are typically performed at your urologist's office. If MR-guided biopsy is recommended, this will be performed at IHS' Encinitas location.

In preparation for a prostate biopsy, an IHS nurse will contact you to arrange that you take an antibiotic one day before, the day of, and one day after your biopsy. You will undergo two fleet enemas an hour apart the morning of the procedure. You should have no food after midnight the evening before your biopsy, although you are able to drink water and take medication as prescribed. Conscious sedation is used to reduce discomfort associated with biopsy (the same type used for a colonoscopy). As a result, you will need someone to drive you to and from your biopsy appointment.