X-ray

What is an X-ray?

An X-ray is a picture of the body produced by X-rays in a similar way to a normal photograph being produced by light. An X-ray machine produces a burst of high energy radiation which passes through the body to produce an image on a film or detector. The images are then used to show bone and some soft tissue in an area specified by a healthcare professional. You cannot see or feel an X-ray, they are a quick and simple way of looking at the inner body.

What do I do before my X-ray?

Your appointment letter will tell you the date, time and department to attend for your X-ray. Unless you are told otherwise, no special preparation is needed. There are, however, a few things you can do to make your appointment run more smoothly:

- We advise that you leave any valuables at home
- Please wear clothing that has no metallic or plastic parts such as buttons, zips and hooks, this may avoid the need to change into a hospital gown for your examination
- If you have any disabilities or special needs please telephone the department on the number detailed in the appointment letter so that we can ensure your needs are met and, if necessary, allow extra time for your appointment
- Some X-ray tables (couches/beds) have a patient weight limit for safe use - usually 120-130kg (approx 20 stone). If you feel this may cause a problem please telephone the X-ray department on the number detailed in your appointment letter.

What will happen when I arrive for my X-ray?

- When you arrive at the hospital, a member of staff will greet you and check your personal details, name, date of birth and address
- You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have
- You may be asked to change into a gown

What will happen during the X-ray?

The X-ray will be carried out by a Radiographer or other healthcare practitioner. You may be asked to lie on a couch (X-ray table), stand against a vertical board (upright) or sit in a chair, depending upon the body part

to be X-rayed.

The Radiographer will manoeuvre you into the correct position, which may involve them touching the area to be X-rayed to feel for your bones and ensure you are in the correct position. They will then position the X-ray tube (camera) correctly by shining a light on the area to be X-rayed. You will be asked to keep still and sometimes to hold your breath for a few seconds while the Radiographer takes the X-ray. You will not see or feel the X-ray, but you may hear a noise from the X-ray tube (camera). This procedure may happen several times, using different positions depending upon the area being X-rayed.

You will be asked to wait while your images are processed. Once the Radiographer is happy with the technical outcome of the images the examination will be over and you will be able to leave the department.

How long does the X-ray take?

The examination normally takes between 10 and 30 minutes, although the actual duration will depend on the area of your body being examined.

What happens after the X-ray?

Once the examination is complete you will be able to leave the department and undertake your normal activities. A Consultant Radiologist will report on your X-rays and the results will be sent to the referrer (doctor or other healthcare professional, who requested the examination). You will need to make an appointment with the referrer (doctor or healthcare professional) to receive your results.

Are there any risks from X-rays?

There is very little risk with having an X-ray. The use of X-rays in hospitals is subject to strict regulations and the use of X-rays is assessed on the principle that the risk of having the X-ray examination outweighs the risk of not having the X-ray examination. X-ray examinations are therefore only performed when absolutely necessary.

When X-rays are taken, some of the energy in the X-ray beam is absorbed in the body. This is called the radiation dose. Because diagnostic X-ray examinations involve relatively low doses, these doses are often compared to natural background radiation. Female patients who are, or might be pregnant, should tell the Radiographer who will decide if special precautions need to be taken.

You should not worry about the radiation from the X-ray as your doctor feels there is a need to investigate a potential problem, so the risk of not having the investigation could be greater.

Find out more about X-rays at Nuffield Health hospitals by filling in the form on the right.

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