A breast MRI is a way of looking at breast tissue to detect any early signs of breast cancer. It is often used to further check findings of concern from a mammogram or ultrasound. While a breast MRI does not show calcifications as well as a mammogram does, the MRI may help:

- reduce the need for a breast biopsy based on mammogram findings
- confirm the need to perform a biopsy based on what the MRI shows
- show a new area of concern

Breast MRI is very helpful in women with breast implants because the tissue around the breast implant can be viewed. A mammogram does not show all areas that may be hidden by the implant. Breast MRI is also able to find any leaks or tears in the implants.

Some younger women tend to have dense breast tissue. Dense tissue appears white on a mammogram, which can make some abnormalities very hard to see. MRI can be helpful in women with dense breasts.

Breast MRI is also used to help in the staging of breast cancer. If an area of breast cancer has been found on a mammogram or ultrasound, MRI may be used to look for other areas in the breast that may have been too small to be seen. It is also helpful in planning the best treatment method for women with breast cancer and in checking to see if present treatments are being effective.

Most insurance companies provide coverage for this exam. If there is any question, check with your insurance about coverage before the test is done.

**Having a Breast MRI**

A breast MRI is done using a special type of machine that uses magnetic fields and radio waves to create images of the breast. The test usually takes between 30 and 45 minutes. The woman lies face down on a padded table with her arms above her head and her breasts positioned on a specially designed table. The table slides into the opening of the MRI machine until the breasts are in the center of the opening. During the test, radio signals are turned on and off. These signals create echoes in the body that are measured by the MRI scanner. There are loud banging sounds during the test. It is very important to lie still.

Just before being positioned on the table, an IV is started and a small amount of contrast material is injected into the IV. This contrast helps to make the images clearer and highlights areas of concern.
You **cannot** have a breast MRI if you:
- Could be pregnant
- Weigh over 350 pounds
- Have any implanted device such as a pacemaker, defibrillator, aneurysm clips, stent or tissue expanders (Note – some pacemakers and aneurysm clips are MRI safe but will need to be researched and cleared before scheduling.)
- Have any type of metal in your eye, such as shrapnel or fragment
- Fear close spaces (also called claustrophobia)

**Concerns with Scheduling a Breast MRI**

**Medications:**
- Tell us if you are taking any drugs with hormonal or antiangiogenesis action such as chemotherapy agents when you schedule your MRI.
- If you are taking Tamoxifen or Arimidex, you can schedule anytime.
- Your exam is best performed after stopping hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for 30 days.
- If you are using birth control pills or patch, schedule the exam on day 7 – 10 of the pill cycle.

**Other:**
- Pre-menopausal women: Schedule your MRI on day 7 to 20 of menstrual cycle with the best time being day 7 to 10.
- Postmenopausal women: Schedule anytime unless taking HRT (follow the steps above).

**Before Breast MRI**
- You may eat, drink and take your regular medications before the test.
- To help you relax, you may bring a favorite CD to listen to during your exam. A headset is available to listen to music.
- If being in close space frightens you, talk to your doctor before the test. Your doctor may give you something to help you relax.

**After Breast MRI**
You can return to your regular activity and diet, unless you’ve been told differently by your doctor.

Talk with your doctor about any questions or concerns about Breast MRI.