



How to deal with scanxiety

brainstrust information sheet

Know Hows are published by *brainstrust* to help people living with a brain tumour to understand current topics. They are produced with input from relevant scientific and clinical experts and are written in a way that should help you to understand often complicated topics.

If you have an idea for a Know How, then please let us know.

If you have any queries, don't forget you can talk to one of our support specialists on **01983 292 405**, or email **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**.

Why do we need this Know How?

When you are diagnosed with a brain tumour, MRI scans become an integral part of your care plan. How frequently you have an MRI scan can vary depending on your diagnosis, individual treatment plan and also your wishes. Because of this, scanxiety is something that many people with a brain tumour diagnosis experience.

You may feel conflicted about whether to have a scan or not, and you may find yourself under pressure to have one from people close to you. This can add to your anxiety. You don't have to have a scan at the recommended interval (called 'interval scanning'). Some people find it reassuring to have a scan. Others wonder whether it is necessary, particularly if things haven't changed and quality of life is good. If you are unsure, you can always discuss the situation with your clinical team.

This Know How will go through some strategies to help you cope with scanxiety and feel better prepared and more in control in the run-up to MRI scans.

What is scanxiety?

Scanxiety (scan anxiety) describes the fear and worry that can come with having a scan, both before and after a scan and before the results are given. It can manifest itself differently in different people, and you may experience it for every scan you have or just some. Being able to manage your scanxiety and knowing where to go for support are key to being able to control it.

Strategies to help with scanxiety

Before your MRI scan

Whether you are recently diagnosed or have been living with a brain tumour diagnosis for some time, the feelings you may experience in the lead-up to an MRI can be the same. Some people think that over time the anxiety should reduce, but this isn't always the case. If you are living with a brain tumour, knowing that at some point the tumour could change, then as time goes on, the anxiety can increase.

How to prepare:

- If you are waiting for your first MRI scan, or your scan is at a different hospital, you may find it helpful to find out about the type of scanner that will be used, to help you feel more prepared. You can ask your clinical team about this.
- Once you have an appointment for your MRI, you may find it helpful to plan the day. Think about things such as your travel plans for your appointment, making sure you allocate plenty of time, and maybe think about organising something enjoyable to do after your appointment. Organising these details ahead of your scan day can help you to feel more in control and organised.
- You may find it helpful to write down your concerns and feelings about your MRI scan. Pinpointing exactly what it is about your MRI scan that is making you feel anxious can help you find appropriate strategies to deal with it. Our '[How to deal with the overwhelm](#)' Know How contains some useful tips that you can use to prioritise things and find clarity.
- If you have any direct concerns about your MRI scan that you feel could affect you being able to have your scan, it is important that you speak to your clinical team about this. If the team is aware, there may be things it can implement to help you feel more comfortable on the day. You may also want to speak to your GP as well. Being proactive will help everyone and may avoid you having to cancel a scan on the day.
- Dress warmly, or ask for a blanket. Scan rooms tend to be cooled, due to the heat generated by the technology.

You can find information about MRI scans [here](#).

During your MRI scan

- When you have an MRI scan, you are often given headphones or earplugs to block out the noise being made by the scanner. You can ask the radiographer who is operating the MRI machine if you can listen to music while you are having your scan – sometimes you can bring your own music or podcasts, etc.
- When you are having your MRI scan, you may find it useful to implement some self-activated strategies, such as mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of taking the time to focus on one particular task or activity, and being completely in the present moment. Practising mindful breathing while you are having your scan can help you to focus on your body and your breathing rather than the scan itself. You can find some mindfulness practice ideas [here](#).
- Being able to feel more relaxed about an MRI scan can often take practice and preparation beforehand. Hypnotherapy is a complementary therapy that can be used to help manage anxiety and stress, and build resilience and confidence. This is something you may want to explore ahead of your MRI scans, with the idea that you implement the methods before, during and after your scan. Find out more [here](#).

After your MRI scan

You may find yourself experiencing a series of different emotions following an MRI scan. Initially, you may feel relief that the scan is over, but then you may find that you are starting to worry about the results of the scan.

You should receive scan results within two weeks, although sometimes you may get your results sooner than this. If the wait for your scan results exceeds two weeks, get in touch with your clinical team to find out why there is a delay.

Below are some tips and strategies that you may want to try following your MRI scan:

- In the busyness of our lives, we can sometimes lose sight of pleasure and forget to spend time doing the things that bring us joy. Dedicating some time out of your day to do something for you, no matter how small, can help you to step out of your feelings of scanxiety and focus on something else. Make a list of things that you can do for you, and promise to do at least one of these things a day. You can find some suggestions [here](#).
- You may find that talking to lots of different people about your brain tumour and MRI scans is helpful, or it can increase your feelings of anxiety. You may want to only tell a group of selected people that you are having a scan, or have someone communicate your scan results on your behalf. Sometimes you may find it helpful to speak to others who understand, and this is something *brainstrust* can help with, through our peer support service. Find out more about that [here](#).

As well as all of the strategies mentioned above, you can talk to us at *brainstrust*. Give us a call on **01983 292 405**, email **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**, or if you know who your support specialist is, contact them.

Ask yourself

- What specifically is making me feel anxious about my next scan?
- What strategies can I put in place to help me deal with my anxiety?
- Who can I talk to about the way I am feeling?
- Do I need to have this scan?
- How do I want to share the results of the scan?
- What pleasurable things can I build into my day in the run-up to my scan, on the day of my scan and in the time after my scan, when I am waiting for my results?

Contact

Talk to *brainstrust*. We can help. You can call, write, type, text. Email for help and support:

hello@brainstrust.org.uk

Telephone: **01983 292 405**.

Other helpful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/mri-scan/what-happens

[www.brainstrust.org.uk/
counsellinghypnotherapy](http://www.brainstrust.org.uk/counsellinghypnotherapy)

www.brainstrust.org.uk/knowhows

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