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X-rays

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What are X-rays?

X-rays refer to radiation, waves or particles that travel through the air like light or radio signals. X-ray energy is high enough that some radiation passes through objects such as internal organs, body tissues, and clothing onto X-ray detectors such as film or a detector linked to a computer monitor. In general, objects that are more dense such as bones and calcium deposits absorb more of the radiation from the X-rays and don't allow as much to pass through them. These objects leave a different image on the detector than less dense objects. Specially trained or experienced physicians can read these images to diagnose medical conditions or injuries.

What are the benefits of X-rays?

X-ray imaging exams are recognized as a valuable medical tool for a wide variety of examinations and procedures including:

- non-invasive and painless diagnosis of disease and monitoring of therapy;
- support of medical and surgical treatment planning; and
- interventional procedures such as placing catheters, stents, or other devices inside the body, or removing blood clots or other blockages.

Are there any risks with X-rays?

There is always a slight risk of damage to cells or tissue from being exposed to any radiation, including the low levels of radiation used for this test. But the risk of damage from the X-rays is usually very low compared with the potential benefits of the test. For example, the radiation exposure from a chest X-ray is about equal to the natural radiation exposure received during a round-trip airline flight from Montreal to Vancouver.

You can reduce your radiation risks and contribute to your successful examination or procedure by:

- Keeping a medical X-ray history;
- Making your current healthcare provider aware of your medical X-ray history;
- Informing X-ray technologists in advance if you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant.

Can I refuse an X-ray examination?

You do have the right to refuse the X-ray examination. If you do, please inform your physician that you have, as it may determine your treatment.

Why do I have to tell if there is any chance of me being pregnant?

The embryo is a rapidly developing/dividing cell system. This makes it sensitive to radiation, especially in the first trimester. A significant dose could increase the incidence of congenital (existing from birth) abnormalities by 1% over the natural incidence. It is proven that radiation in utero is harmful but it should be noted that the probability of this occurrence is small. If you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant, or are trying to become pregnant, PLEASE, notify the technologist before your exam takes place. That way an assessment can be made of your specific situation to determine any risk to an unborn child. If it is decided that the risk is too high, then you may be asked to come back at a later date for your X-ray examination.

Does it hurt?

You will not feel anything during the exposure. It is the same as having your picture taken with a regular camera. You may be asked to hold an uncomfortable position or hold your breath for a short time to get a clear image of the body part being examined. The medical radiation technologist will assist you in finding a comfortable position that still ensures diagnostic imaging quality. Any movement could blur the image and make it necessary to repeat the procedure to get a diagnostic image.

What do I have to wear or remove for the examination?

We suggest you wear clothing you can easily remove as you may have to disrobe for the X-ray. Buttoned and heavily embroidered shirts will have to be removed for chest and spine X-rays and you will be given a gown. Abdomen views, hips, femurs, knees will usually require a gown, unless you are wearing pull-on pants or sweats without any metal or buttons. In a lot of cases, wearing a gown is necessary because many things can show up on your film and can add, obscure or cover the required information. There are obvious things such as coins, zippers, keys etc. Sometimes, plastic buttons, folds of clothing, or wallets, cards etc., can show up as well. You will have to remove any jewellery around the affected areas, for example, earrings, necklaces, glasses and dentures for upper spines and belly button rings for lower spines.

Will the technologist tell me if they see anything wrong?

Technologists are not allowed to diagnose X-rays. A radiologist (a doctor specifically trained to interpret radiology examinations) will analyze the images and a report with his or her interpretation will be provided to your doctor who requested the examination.

When can I expect the results of my X-rays or Fluoroscopy Examination?

The time it takes your doctor to receive a written report on the test or procedure you have had will vary, depending on:

- the urgency with which the result is needed;
- the complexity of the examination;
- whether more information is needed from your doctor before the examination can be interpreted by the radiologist;
- whether you have had previous X-rays or other medical imaging that needs to be compared with this new test or procedure;
- how the report is conveyed by us to your doctor (in other words, email, fax or mail).

If there is anything that requires immediate attention, your doctor's office will contact you and inform as to the best course of action. It is important that you discuss the results with the doctor who referred you, either in person or on the telephone, so that they can explain what the results mean for you.