MRI Results for MS

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Preparing for Your MRI Results

Having an MRI test done can be a nerve-wracking experience, but waiting for the test results is even worse. If you've had an MRI because your doctor suspects you may suffer from MS, the wait for news might seem to go on forever. Here are a few tips on how to prepare for the follow up appointment and results.

- **Don't Go Alone** – It is normal to feel stressed and anxious about this appointment, given the bad news it may bring. Bring a good friend or family member who not only loves you, but who is supportive and helpful. You will need this support should your MRI results show brain changes suggesting MS.
- **Try To Relax** – Stress will not help you in any way, but it will affect your judgment and ability to plan for the future, whether the news is good or bad. Try to take deep breaths and maintain a positive attitude before and during the appointment. In the lead up, consider doing yoga or other relaxation techniques.
- **Understand What The MRI Is –** An MRI alone can't confirm or rule out MS. In fact, there is no single test that confirms the diagnosis of MS. Doctors use medical history, neurological examination, and various lab tests as well as MRI results to rule out other conditions that can mimic MS or diagnose MS.Out of all tests available, the MRI is considered the best non-invasive tool to investigate MS. Although quite accurate, MRIs still provided a false negative (not showing brain changes even though you have the disease) about 5% of the time. In other cases, it can show a false positive (showing typical MS lesions, but you don't have the disease). As well as helping with diagnosis, MRI is used to monitor the progression of MS.

Getting Your Results

There are three options for your MRI results. Firstly, your MRI may not show any brain lesions characteristic to MS. This is great news, and you will feel a big relief. Your doctor may still recommend another MRI later on if he or she feels that physical and neurological exams are strongly supporting this diagnosis.

A second option is that the MRI results are 'inconclusive'. The next step it to get another test called a spinal tap or lumbar puncture to examine the cerebrospinal fluid. A spinal tap can reveal immunologic changes that are characteristic to MS and also help rule out other conditions (such as infections). Evoked potential tests may also be recommended if the MRI is inconclusive. These tests involve stimulation of the nerves in the visual pathway, brainstem and spinal cord.

The third possible result is an MRI that shows brain lesions typical in MS. If your other test results and examinations strongly support MS, the doctor will likely diagnose you with MS. At this point he/she will provide you with details about the disease, progression, treatment options and answer any questions you may have.

Keep in mind that as a patient, you can always get a second opinion. Before fully accepting a diagnosis such as MS, see another neurologist and ask for their opinion. Don't tell your new doctor what the first doctor said, but rather bring the results of the tests, and describe your past and present symptoms in great details to get a new, fresh perspective of your conditions.