

MRI MYTHS

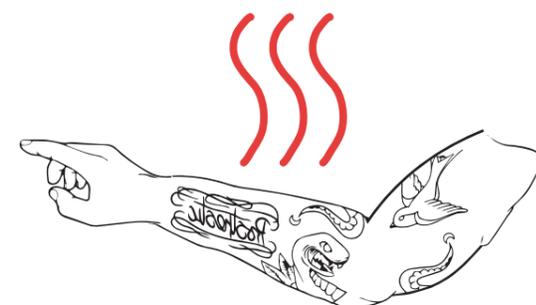
AN MRI SCAN INVOLVES DANGEROUS RADIATION

This is false. MRI uses a magnet, radio waves and a computer to obtain images of your brain. No X-ray radiation is involved. The term radio waves is used because the signals that an MRI scanner picks up are in a similar frequency range to those used for standard radio transmission.



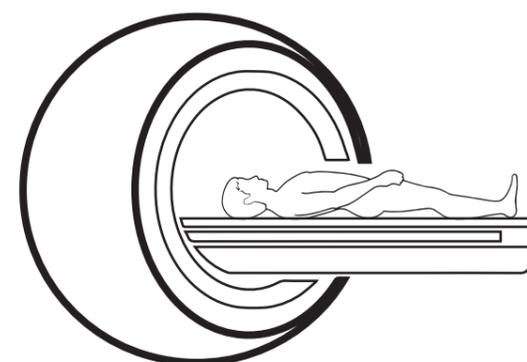
MY TATTOO WILL HEAT UP

This is plausible. Some tattoo inks contain traces of iron that can react to the radio waves used by the MRI machine, causing swelling, irritations and burns. Most tattoos don't cause problems, and even if they do the effects may only be mild and temporary. It is important that if you have any tattoos you tell the radiographers. Depending on the size of the tattoo and where it is, they may place a cool pad on it before your scan in order to minimise any discomfort.



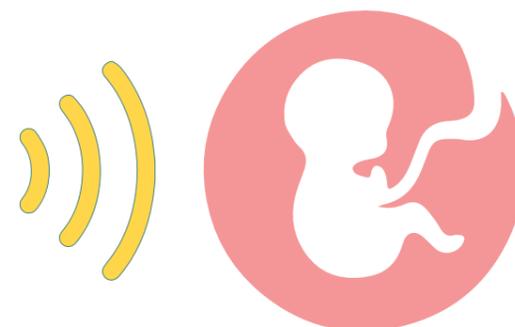
I CAN'T GET AN MRI BECAUSE I AM CLAUSTROPHOBIC

This is true in cases of severe claustrophobia. Modern scanners are more comfortable than the past, though; they can be surprisingly spacious and well lit, so don't let a past experience (or others' experiences) put you off! If you feel nervous or uncomfortable you can always seek assistance from the radiographer. You will usually have a mirror system that allows you to watch what is going on outside the scanner. Depending on the type of scan, you may be able to watch a video or listen to music during your scan.



I CAN'T HAVE AN MRI BECAUSE I AM PREGNANT

This is still controversial. To date, no evidence has been obtained indicating that MRI during pregnancy has produced harmful effects to the foetus and to the mother. MRI has been used in pregnant women for more than 30 years for clinical purposes and it is still used in hospitals. However, the possibility that risks may be discovered in the future cannot be ruled out. For this reason MRI is not usually used for research purposes during pregnancy whereas it is allowed for very specific clinical applications where the benefits of having an MRI scan outweighs the potential risks.



WITH MRI SCIENTISTS CAN READ MY MIND

This is false. With functional MRI (fMRI) scientists can analyse which part of the brain is working harder than others while doing psychological tasks. This information is used in brain research to understand causes of disease and biological mechanisms underlying symptoms. There is evidence that may be possible to predict very specific and well-known mental states (like watching a house instead of watching a face) from brain activations detected with fMRI, but it is impossible to use brain scans to read someone else mind.

