

# Having an arthrogram to diagnose and treat joint pain

Radiology Department

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: May 2026

Next review: May 2029

Leaflet number: 2 Version: 8

## Introduction

If you are an outpatient please read your appointment letter carefully. Check which hospital your appointment is at.

Please read all of this leaflet. It tells you about your examination. It has important information and instructions.

## What is an arthrogram?

An arthrogram is a special test to look at the space between the bones of a joint. This could be your shoulder, knee, hip or another joint.

We do the injection with X-ray or ultrasound guidance. During the test, we inject a special dye called contrast into the joint. It shows up on X-ray or ultrasound pictures. This helps us to get better pictures of the inside of your joint. We may also inject air into the joint.

After the injection, you may also have a CT or MRI scan of the joint. This is to get more detailed pictures. If you are having an MRI scan after the joint injection, we may give you another injection of contrast.

The aim of an arthrogram is to help find out (diagnose) the cause of your symptoms.

We may do an arthrogram to treat joint pain. If this happens we may inject steroid medicine and local anaesthetic into the joint.

## Information for patients with diabetes

If you have diabetes, please tell the person doing your examination before it starts. This is important. Having steroid medicine injected into your joint could affect your blood sugar level for a few days.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.uhleicester.nhs.uk](http://www.uhleicester.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## Important information before you have X-rays with contrast liquid:

The contrast liquid used in your examination has iodine in it. Your kidneys remove iodine from your body. It comes out in your pee (urine). If you have kidney dialysis, this will remove the iodine.

### Please tell the X-ray staff when you arrive if:

- You are allergic to iodine or rubber (latex), or have any other allergies or have asthma.
- You have had a reaction in the past to a contrast liquid injected into a vein (intravenous contrast). This is the dye used for kidney X-rays, CT scans and X-rays of your heart and blood vessels.
- You are on kidney dialysis or have any kidney problems.
- You have diabetes.

We will ask you questions about your health before the test starts.

## What if I am taking blood thinners?

If you are taking medicine that thins the blood (anticoagulants or antiplatelets) you may need to stop taking it. Or, you may need to take a different one for a few days.

Please call the radiology department for advice as soon as possible. The number to call is on your appointment letter. It is also at the end of this leaflet. We will ask you what blood thinning medicine you are taking. We will ask how much you take (the dose), and what you are taking it for.

**Common examples of these drugs include aspirin, warfarin, clopidogrel (Plavix®), apixiban (Eliquis), edoxaban (Lixiana), rivaroxaban (Xarelto), ticagrelor (Brilinta), dalteparin, enoxaparin and heparin.**

You may have already been given instructions on blood thinners by the doctor who referred you for this examination. Please still call the radiology department so we can check this.

## What arrangements must I make before my appointment?

Before you can have a joint injection, you need to plan the following:

- You must be collected by a responsible adult after your appointment. They must take you home in a car or taxi after the joint injection.
- You must have a responsible adult at home with you for at least 24 hours after your joint injection.
- You must **not** drive or cycle for at least 24 hours after your joint injection.

**Important: Driving after an anaesthetic is a criminal offence and will affect your insurance cover.**

## How do I get ready for the appointment?

You do not need to do anything special to get ready before you come to the hospital.

If you are having a knee or ankle arthrogram you can wear short trousers or a skirt. This means you may not need to get changed at the hospital.

### Please call the radiology department to tell us if:

- you have a high temperature (fever) and feel unwell
- you are on antibiotics
- you are within a few days of a surgical procedure

The number to call is on your appointment letter. It is also at the end of this leaflet. It may be that we will need to re-arrange your appointment.

## Who will be doing my examination?

- A doctor who specialises in X-ray treatments and scans (a radiologist) will do the examination.
- A radiographer will move and control the special X-ray equipment.
- A nurse or healthcare assistant will work with the radiologist and care for you.
- A student may also be in the room to learn. If you do not want this, you can ask that a student is not in the room.

## How long will it take?

The time will vary for each patient. Most arthrograms take about **20 to 40 minutes**. We may ask you to stay in the radiology department for a short time afterwards. This is so we can check you are OK.

If you are having an MRI scan after the injection, the MRI scan can take another 30 to 60 minutes. You should expect to be in the department for up to 2 hours in total.

## Asking for your permission (consent)

The doctor who referred you should have talked to you about the reasons for this examination and any other options.

You have been referred to a doctor who specialises in imaging and X-ray treatments (a radiologist) for this procedure. They will check that you know why the procedure is being done, the potential risks and the chances of success

You will sign a consent form to confirm this. This may be on an iPad or a paper form. **You should feel that you know enough before you sign the consent form.**

If after talking to the radiologist you do not want to have the examination then you can decide to say no. We will talk to you about your options.

If the radiologist feels that your health problem has changed they will talk to you about if the examination is still needed. They may ask for the doctor who wanted you to have the examination to talk to you and review your health problem.

## What happens during the arthrogram?

- When you get to the radiology department you will be shown to the waiting area.
- We may ask you to change into a hospital gown. If you are having a knee or ankle arthrogram you can wear short trousers or a skirt so that you do not need to get changed at the hospital.
- We will take you into the X-ray room. We will talk to you about your examination. You may ask any questions about it.
- We may take some X-rays of your joint before the arthrogram starts.
- You will lie down on the X-ray table.
- We will keep everything clean (sterile). We clean your skin with antiseptic. This may feel cold. We cover some of your body with sterile sheets.
- We inject some local anaesthetic into the skin and deeper tissues over the joint. This may sting to start with. This soon wears off and the skin and deeper tissues should then feel numb. Please tell us if the examination does become uncomfortable.
- We will use X-rays or ultrasound to help guide the tip of the needle into the joint where the injection will go.
- We will inject a small amount of contrast liquid into the joint. We may also inject a small amount of air.
- We may inject a small amount of steroid (to reduce inflammation) and local anaesthetic into the joint. We only do this if your doctor has asked for it.
- At the end of your examination, we will put a wound dressing over the injection site.

## What happens after my arthrogram?

We may ask you to wait in the radiology department for a short time. This is so we can check you are OK.

- We may give you some exercises to do for the joint we injected
- **For a few hours** after the injection your joint may feel uncomfortable. It may also squelch if air has been injected into it.
- **Do not drive or cycle for 24 hours after injection.** You will need someone to drive you home.
- **For 3 to 4 days:** You can do light activity such as sitting, standing and some walking. We ask you not to do heavy manual work for 3 to 4 days.
- **It may take 3 to 4 weeks** to see the benefit of the injection.
- If the injection does not work then the referring doctor may talk to you about other options at your follow-up appointment.

## Are there any risks and complications?

As with any procedure there is a risk of complications.

Below are the most common risks and complications. The chance of these happening is different for each person. We will talk to you about your risks before you sign the consent form.

- **Infection:** there is a very small risk of an infection getting into the joint. This affects less than 1 in 100 people. Over the next few days, if the injection site gets red, hot or painful, or if you get a high temperature (fever) contact your GP or call the NHS helpline on 111.
- **Bleeding or bruising:** there may be a small amount of bleeding or bruising at the injection site. This affects less than 1 in 100 people. Bleeding and bruising can cause pain for a few days.
- **Increased pain:** your pain symptoms can get worse (become aggravated) for a few hours or days before the injection starts to work. If your pain gets worse a few days after the injection it could be a sign of infection and you should call your GP or NHS 111 for help.
- **Reaction to contrast liquid:** some patients may be allergic to the contrast. You could get symptoms such as a rash. Any side effects usually happen within 20 minutes. If you get any of these symptoms at the hospital, tell the doctor, nurse or other staff looking after you. If you start to get symptoms at home you should contact your GP or call the NHS helpline on 111.
- **Reaction to local anaesthetic:** some patients could get symptoms like feeling dizzy, low blood pressure, allergic reaction or irregular heart rate. In most patients this is temporary and settles on its own.

### Possible side effects from the steroid injection:

- **Feeling dizzy**
- **Headache**
- **High or low blood pressure**
- **Feeling sick or being sick**
- **Loose poo (diarrhoea), or**
- **Redness in the face (flushing)**

These may happen for a short time. Most patients do not get these side effects. Usually these side effects happen straight away, but can happen in the next few days.

- **Irregular periods.** Patients who have menstrual periods may notice that their menstrual cycle is slightly irregular for a few months.
- **Changes to your blood sugar levels.** Patients with diabetes should monitor their blood sugar more closely over the next few days.
- **If you have any problems after the examination please call your GP or call the NHS helpline on 111.**



## What are the risks from radiation in this X-ray test?

The main risk from exposure to X-rays is a higher risk of getting a cancer in the future. This risk is thought to be very small.

We are all exposed to natural background radiation every day of our lives. This comes from the sun, the food we eat, and the ground. Each test that uses X-rays gives a dose on top of this natural background radiation.

The risks of radiation are slightly higher for an unborn child. We must ask all patients age 10 to 15 years registered female and all patients aged 16 to 55 years about their periods and/or possibility of being pregnant.

The benefits of having this examination are likely to outweigh any possible risks. The risks of not having the examination could be greater. We try to keep your exposure to X-rays as low as possible.

## How do I get the results?

You will not get the results straight away.

After your examination we will tell you who the results will go to and how to get your results.

The radiologist will look at your arthrogram pictures again.

Your results will be sent to the doctor who referred you for this examination.

Your report will go on the NHS App after an inbuilt delay. Your GP or hospital doctor may have your report before you. These reports are medically technical reports. They are written for the referrer to help to make a diagnosis and pick treatment options. If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to your referring clinician.

## What if I need to talk to someone?



### If you have any questions or concerns, or cannot make the appointment:

Please call the Radiology department on **0116 258 8765** and select **option 7**. Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, but not on bank holidays.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

Previous reference:

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net)