

# How can we help patients overcome MRI anxiety?

November 24 2014, by Robyn Mills

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Fear and anxiety about undergoing an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan is a very real issue among patients.

Researchers at the University of Adelaide's Joanna Briggs Institute have been working to better understand the difficulties faced by patients when undergoing an MRI scan, and how to help ease their fears and lead to greater [patient satisfaction](#).

"MRI is a commonplace diagnostic procedure and has been for many years now. The vast majority of patients have no problems, but other patients frequently experience anxiety, fear and claustrophobia during an MRI scan," says Dr Zachary Munn, Acting Director of Synthesis Science with the University's Joanna Briggs Institute.

"Although hospital staff often view this procedure as routine, for many patients this is a difficult procedure to go through, especially if claustrophobia sets in.

"There are some key issues here: the patient experience is, of course, of great importance to us; and the quality of the scans is important too - if distressed patients are moving when the scan is underway, that work will need to be redone, potentially leading to further anxiety for the patient, and costs to the health system.

"MRI anxiety occurs in both adults and children, with some patients requiring sedation to help get them through the experience. Our aim is to

find opportunities to assist patients without using sedatives," Dr Munn says.

In one of the latest studies published by the researchers, in the *Journal of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences*, they found that patients' anxiety can be eased simply by providing more information about the MRI experience.

"Providing patients with quality information is a good first step towards reducing [patients'](#) fears. If medical staff are personable and talk the patient through their experience, it also helps greatly. Each patient should be treated with individual care," he says.

"The physical environment where the MRI is being conducted can also play a substantial role. There are some very simple things that can be done: such as playing relaxing music, and for children there are new MRI designs that look like spaceships or a jungle - it gives the impression that the child is going on an adventure.

"Our research so far has shown that MRI clinics that have been able to modify some or all of these aspects of the experience have shown improvements in patient [anxiety](#) levels," he says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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