

A visit to the MRI scanner

by Bérengère Digard

Dear participant,

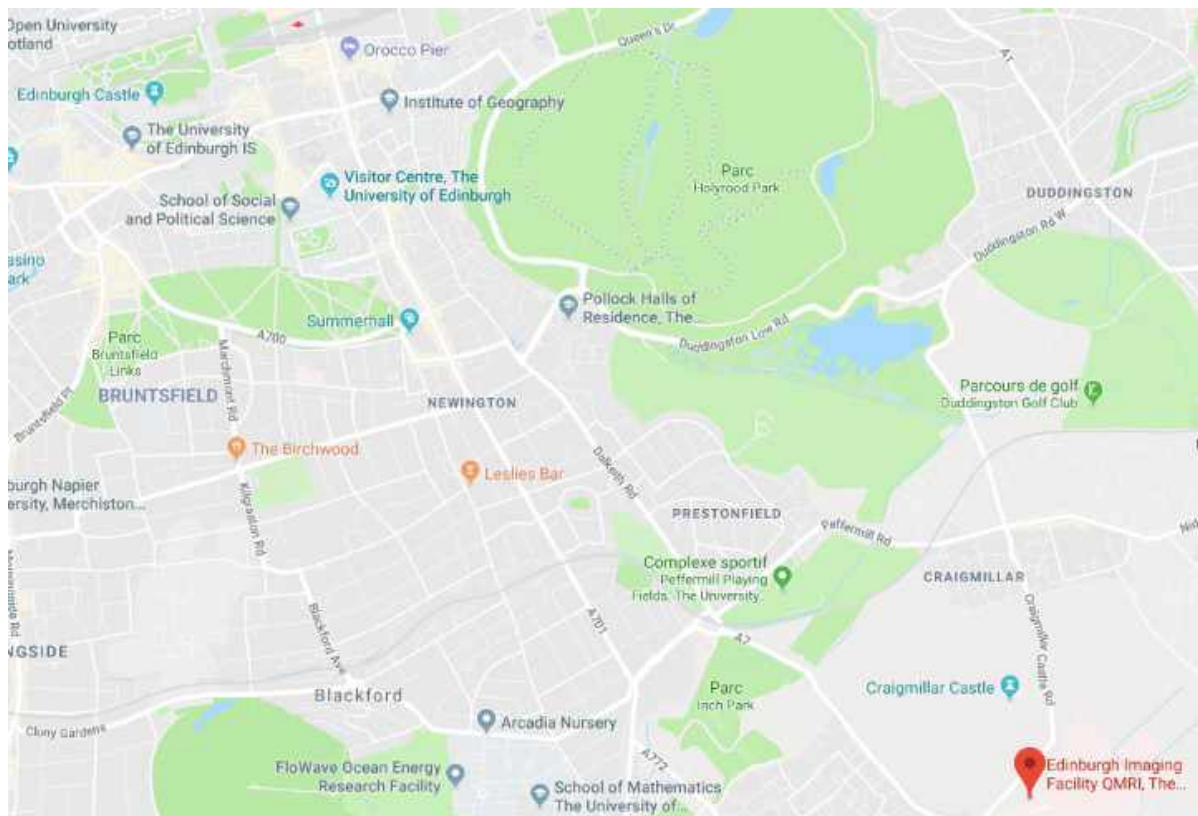
First, let me thank you once more for helping me with my Ph.D. research. Without your support, I simply wouldn't be able to do this study. You are at the centre of it all, and I want to make sure you are enjoying the experience. As such, I wrote this little guide for you.

A visit to a scanning facility is an unusual experience for most people, and few know what to expect. After all, it might not be exactly as in the movies and TV shows you've seen (real life science is rarely like in the movies). I figured you might like to have a wee bit of a heads up before coming to the facility, to get yourself ready for the appointment.

The scanning facility, the CRIC

The appointment will take place at the Clinical Research Imaging Centre (CRIC), based at the Queen's Medical Research Institute (QMRI), Royal Infirmary Edinburgh campus.

Here is a map of Edinburgh showing where the QMRI is.



On arrival

I will be waiting for you in the hall. We will walk down 1 flight of stairs to the basement helpdesk. The person in charge of the helpdesk will give you a scanning checklist, to make sure you are indeed fit to be scanned (we need to ask if you have any metal on your person or in your body, for example). If you have any doubt or question, someone will be here to help you complete the checklist. Even if you're not sure what your height and weight are, a nurse will be there to weight and measure you. If the scan is being used, and not quite ready for you, you will wait in this nicely decorated waiting room. It shouldn't be long, but feel free to bring a book with you, just in case!



Scan time!

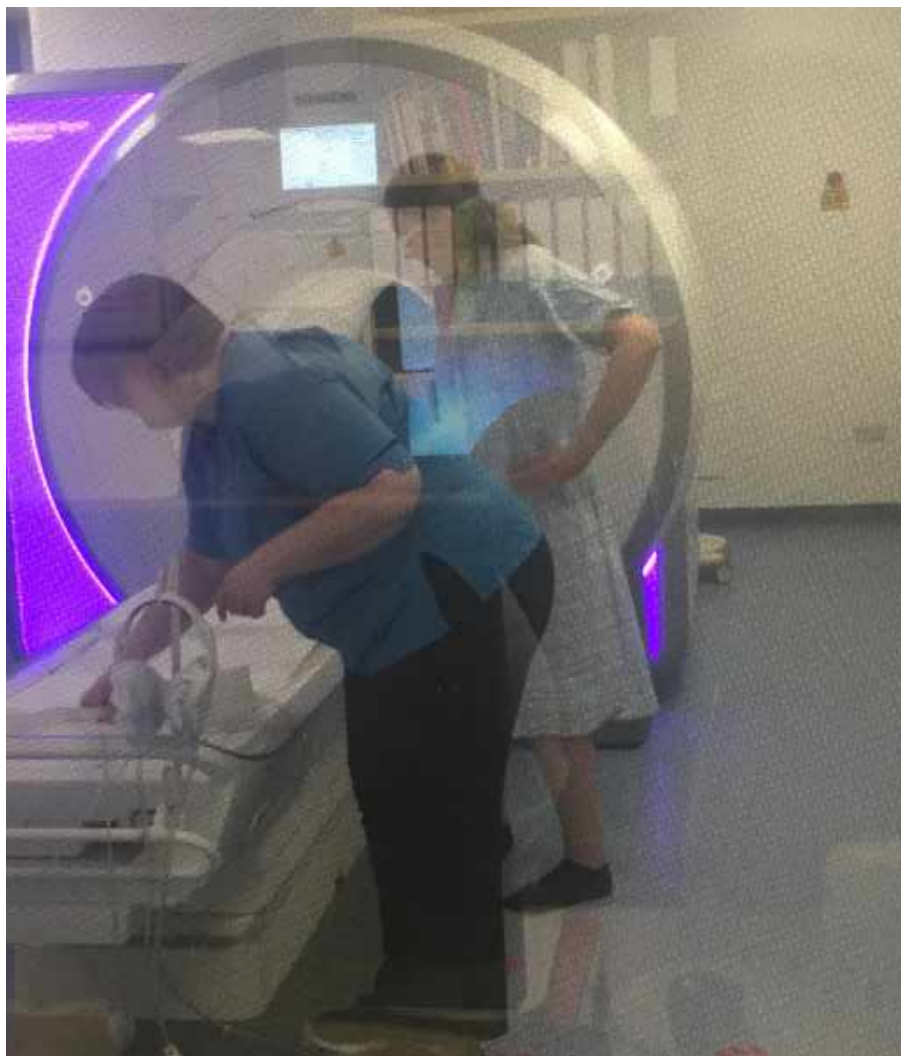
(I apologize for the quality of the pictures of the scanner room, I took them through the window of the scanner office)

When the scanner is ready for you, a nurse will take you to a changing room where you will change into a clean hospital gown. As you can see on the picture below of my flatmate Jess (who kindly tested the study for me), you will keep only keep your underwear under the gown, and you can even keep your socks! If you need glasses, you will be given very fashionable MRI-friendly glasses. It is better if you know your prescription, so that you can quickly pick the lenses you need (see a picture of the lenses box below). On the pictures below you can see Jess wearing said glasses. You might not be able to tell given the low quality of the pictures, but she is smiling, and she is having a great time.

This is a picture of the MRI-friendly glasses, with several lenses available, from +/-2 to +/- 7.



A nurse especially trained for MRI studies will prepare the little bed for you and will make sure you are comfortable. If you like, you can even get a cushion under your knees, for extra comfort.



Here is a picture of Jess looking very happy and comfortable on the scanner bed.



Once everything is ready, the nurses will let you lay down and they will join me in the scanner office, just on the other side of the window.



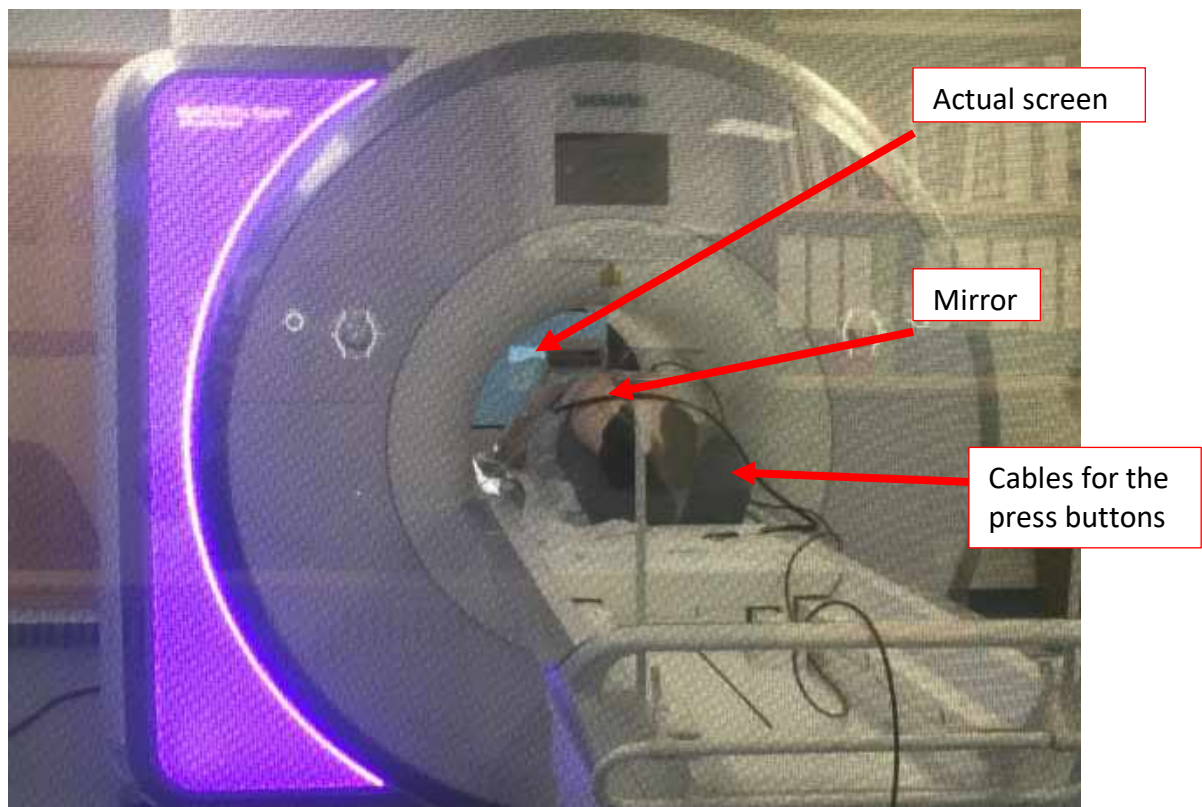
Here is a nicer picture of the same moment in the scanning session.



Credits: University of Edinburgh

The scanner bed will then slide into a short tunnel that will surround only the upper part of your body, as you can see in the picture below. You will simply have to lie still during the rest of the scanning session. Scanners can be a bit noisy, so we will provide you with earplugs or headphones to make you feel more comfortable. The radiographer will talk to you during the scan to make sure you are still comfortable and happy to continue. If you wish to get out of the scanner at any point (because you feel claustrophobic for example), you will be able to do so simply by informing the radiographer. They will help you out of the scanner safely.

Once in the scanner, you will see a mirror in front of you, that will reflect a screen located behind the scanner (as you can see – a bit – in the picture below). That's by looking into this mirror that you will be able to follow the exercises I've prepared for the session. You will also have little press buttons in your hands, and you will be able to answer the questions in the exercises simply by pressing the right or the left button.



You will start the session by doing one of the exercises you did during your first appointment with me, the one with the little avatar on the screen, standing next to a 6 or a 9. Don't worry if you cannot remember the exercise, I will remind you of it while we wait in the waiting room.

You will then do a new task that involve short stories on comic strips, and you'll simply have to guess the final picture of the story.

The session also involves some time without any tasks to do, and you will be able to simply rest and relax, will listening to the music chosen by the nurse. If you want, we can also tell me in advance what song or music you like to listen to relax, and I'll see if we can get it for you! In total you will stay in the MRI for about 40 or 50 min, with the exercises taking about 25 to 30 min, and the rest of the time will be just the relax time.

During the entire time, I will be in the scanner office, just on the other side of the window, with the nurses and the radiographer. We will be able to speak to you, and you will be able to speak to us, using microphones and speakers.

After the scan

Once all is done, we will get the scanner bed out of the scanner, and the nurse will join you to help you get down the scanner bed. She will guide you to the dressing room where you will change back into your own clothes.

Once you are ready, I will join you in the waiting room to give you your gift voucher (to thank you for your invaluable help that will be valued at £20 😊), and check your travel expenses. I will then guide you back upstairs and outside the building. If needed I will help you find the closest bus or order a taxi.

Last note

I hope this wee guide will help you get ready for the appointment. Of course, if you have other questions, please do email me. Know that we also have a mock MRI scanner at my lab, at the Kennedy Tower, so if you would like to pop by to have a look, do tell me and we will arrange your visit. If there is anything I can do to make your participation in my study a great experience, just say the word!