



---

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Frequently Asked Questions About Viewing Your Radiology Test Results

This information answers some common questions about viewing radiology test results. These test results are called a radiology report.

## **When can I see my radiology results?**

Radiology results, also known as imaging results, (such as PET, MRI and CT scans) are available in MyMSK (our patient portal) as soon as they're in our computer system. This means you may see them before your healthcare provider reviews them or discusses them with you.

## **Where can I find my radiology results?**

You can see the report about your results in MyMSK using the app or the web browser (desktop or mobile device):

- If you're using the MyMSK mobile app, select Medical

Info. Then select Test Results.

- If you're using the web browser, select Medical Info on the blue banner at the top of the screen. Then select Test Results and Reports.

If you have trouble finding your test reports, please call the MyMSK Help Desk toll free at 800-248-0593 or at 646-227-2593. They are available Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Eastern time).

## **How do I print or save my radiology report?**

You can print or save your radiology results using MyMSK.

- If you're using a computer:
  1. Open MyMSK in your web browser.
  2. Click "Medical Info" on the blue banner.
  3. Click "Request Your Medical Records."
- If you're using the MyMSK app on a smartphone or tablet:
  1. Open the MyMSK app.
  2. Tap "Med Info" on the bottom of your screen.
  3. Tap "Export" in the top right corner of your screen.

You can download your lab and test results,

including your radiology reports.

If you do not have a MyMSK account, you can sign up at [my.mskcc.org](https://my.mskcc.org). You can get an enrollment ID by calling 646-227-2593 or your doctor's office.

If you choose not to sign up for MyMSK, you can get a copy of your radiology report by contacting our Release of Information department. You can email them at [HIMROI@mskcc.org](mailto:HIMROI@mskcc.org) or call them at 646-227-2089.

## **How do I send my radiology images to a healthcare provider outside MSK?**

The healthcare provider can ask for the images by filling out our Radiology Image Request form. They can find it at [www.msk.org/departments/radiology/radiology-image-request](https://www.msk.org/departments/radiology/radiology-image-request). This is called a Continuum of Care request. There is no charge.

You can also use MyMSK to ask us to send your radiology images to a healthcare provider outside MSK.

- If you're using a computer:
  1. Open MyMSK in your web browser.
  2. Click "Messages" on the blue banner.
  3. Click "Compose New Message."

4. Click “Request a copy of your radiology exams.”
- If you’re using the MyMSK app on a smartphone or tablet:
  1. Open the MyMSK app.
  2. Tap the “Messages” icon at the bottom of your screen.
  3. Tap “New” at the top right of your screen.
  4. Tap “I want to send a message about another topic.”
  5. Tap “Request a copy of your radiology exam.”

If you choose not to sign up for MyMSK, you can ask us to send your radiology images to a healthcare provider outside MSK by filling out a Release of Information form. You can find it at [www.msk.org/teaser/release-information-form.pdf](http://www.msk.org/teaser/release-information-form.pdf). Print and sign the form, then fax it to the image library at 212-717-3020. You can also email the completed form to [mskimagelibrary@mskcc.org](mailto:mskimagelibrary@mskcc.org)

We will first try to send the images to the healthcare provider electronically. If that does not work, we will mail the CDs with the images. Let us know your email or phone number so we can update you on your request.

## **How do I get a personal copy of my radiology images?**

You can use MyMSK to ask for a personal copy of your radiology images. Follow the same steps as you would to ask us to send them to a healthcare provider outside MSK.

If you choose not to sign up for MyMSK, you can ask for a personal copy of your radiology images by filling out a Release of Information form. You can find it at [www.msk.org/teaser/release-information-form.pdf](http://www.msk.org/teaser/release-information-form.pdf). Print and sign the form, then fax it to 646-227-3545.

We can send your radiology images to you electronically or on a CD. There is a charge for personal CDs of radiology images. If you pick up the CDs from us, the charge is \$20 per CD. If we mail the CDs to you, the charge is \$28 per CD.

## **How are my scans read?**

A radiologist is a doctor who specializes in medical imaging. Your radiologist will look at your scan images and write a report to your doctor. First, they may review your medical record. This lets them learn more about your health conditions and the treatments you had. If there are other scans in your MSK medical record, your

radiologist will compare them to look for changes. The report will have your radiologists findings (observations).

## What if I don't understand the report?

Radiologists use medical words to explain your health to other members of your care team. For most people, it's common not to know the meaning of some words. You can find definitions below and on websites such as [www.radiologyinfo.org](http://www.radiologyinfo.org)

Don't try to understand the results by yourself. Instead, talk with your doctor. They can help you understand the report, based on your medical history, physical examination, laboratory tests, and past radiology exams.

Here are some common terms used in radiology reports and what they mean.

<b>General terms</b>	
Artifact	Something that shows up in your scan that can make it harder for your radiologist to interpret the images. The artifact can be caused things such as metal in your body, or if you move during the scan.
Benign	Something that is not a cancer.
Indeterminate	This finding is seen in a few health

	conditions. We can't make a diagnosis just from the imaging study.
Infectious/inflammatory	Something in your scan that can be caused by an infection or inflammation (swelling). The swelling may be from a reaction to a drug, or an immune response.
Lesion	An area that looks unusual. A lesion can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).
Malignant	A cancer tumor that can spread to other parts of the body.
Mass	Abnormal tissue that can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).
Metastasis	A piece of tumor that has spread from the main tumor (also known as the primary tumor).
Nodule	A rounded or oval growth that can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).
Nonspecific	The finding is seen in many different conditions.
Physiologic	A normal situation for how your body works.
Reference range	Test results are often reported as numbers. To understand the numbers, we compare them to what's normal for

	most people. A “reference range” tells you what numbers are usually normal. Comparing your numbers to the reference range can show you and your doctor if there’s a problem.
Tumor deposit, tumor implant	Words to describe a piece of tumor somewhere in the body.
Unremarkable	We found nothing abnormal or wrong to report about that part of your body.

### Findings in body parts

Atelectasis	A complete or partial collapse of some part of your lung. This often happens because your air sacs are deflated (have no air). Atelectasis is very common. It can show up in the image if you did not take a complete breath. Sometimes it shows up because extra fluid is in the space around your lung. This is called a pleural effusion.
Blastic lesion, sclerotic lesion	Area where your bones grow faster.
Cyst in kidney or liver	A cyst is a pocket filled with fluid or other material. They are common, and usually not cancer. If a cyst concerns your radiologist, you may have more tests.
Diverticulum (or several diverticula, diverticulosis)	An outward bulging, most often found in the colon (large intestine). It is not cancer.
Fatty liver (also	This is a common finding that shows a

called hepatic steatosis)	higher amount of fat in the liver. It can be caused by liver disease or other conditions.
IPMN in pancreas	This is an abbreviation for Intraductal Papillary Mucinous Neoplasm. It is common and usually is not cancer. In a small number of cases, it can develop into cancer. Often, an IPMN needs follow-up imaging tests. The tests check if the lesion has grown or changed over time.
Lymph node sizes	The normal size of a lymph node depends on its location. Lymph nodes can get bigger for many reasons, such as an infection or tumor growth. Radiologists describe the sizes of enlarged (bigger) lymph nodes. Your doctor will interpret that information based on the disease you have.
Lytic lesion	An area within a bone of destroyed bone.
Opacity	A part of the lung that looks different than normal lung. It can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).
Stenosis, stricture	A narrowing of tubes, such as the ones that carry blood or are connected to the kidneys or intestines.

## **PET-CT**

Metabolic activity	The chemical changes that take place in cells and tumors.
--------------------	---

Physiologic uptake (at PET-CT)	The normal use of sugar that all cells in the body need to survive.
SUV and liver reference values (at PET-CT)	During a PET scan, you're injected with radioactive material. Standardized Uptake Value (SUV) shows how much of that injected substance is found in an area of your body. Your PET scan report records this measurement.

### **CT**

Attenuation	This shows how much energy from X-rays is absorbed by a tissue or other substance in your body. We sometimes use it to describe a narrowing of tubes, such as the ones that carry blood.
-------------	--

### **MRI**

Hyperintense	Something that is brighter than another part of the image, such as muscle or liver.
Hypointense	Something that is darker than another part of the image, such as fat.
Signal	The brightness or darkness of each point in an image. Tissues and other substances give off different amounts of signal.

### **Ultrasound (Sonogram)**

Echogenic (also called hyperechoic)	A material or substance that is brighter than the area around it on the ultrasound
-------------------------------------	--

	image.
Hypoechoic	A material or substance that is darker than the area around it on the ultrasound image.

## **The report mentions tiny lung nodules, or nodular thickening of adrenal gland. What does that mean?**

Radiologists use words to describe what they see on the pictures of your insides. When an organ has something that usually is not there, we can describe it as a lesion, nodule, mass, lump, thickening, or nodularity (see list of definitions). These findings are not specific. Often, they do not mean there is cancer.

For example, a CT scan of a lung finds a tiny, benign (not cancer) nodule in about 2 out of every 3 people. It's often from scars from a past infection. We usually monitor these tiny or nonspecific lesions at follow-up exams. Benign lesions in general will not grow.

## **What does “too small to characterize” mean?**

Radiology equipment can show many tiny flaws inside your body. Just as no 2 people look the same from the outside, their insides also look different. Most of the time, tiny lesions are so small radiologists describe them

as “too small to characterize.”

They usually do not mean there is a serious problem. Many are benign (not cancer) cysts, for example. We usually monitor them at follow-up exams. Benign lesions in general will not grow.

## **The report mentions a possible tumor in a part of my body different from the one that was tested. Why?**

An imaging scan can show an abnormality (something that isn't normal) in a different area than the one tested. You may not have any symptoms in this area. These “incidental” (additional) findings (observations) often are not serious.

Sometimes, they can mean there's a major problem. Finding the problem before it causes symptoms is very useful. That's why radiologists mention these results in their reports. They also can recommend what steps to take.

## **What is an anatomic variation?**

Everyone's insides are not arranged the exact same way. Before birth, our bodies develop small differences. They're usually are normal and will not harm you.

## **Why did my radiologist recommend another test?**

Each kind of radiology scan gives certain information about the body. The information is different for each test, because each scan makes images of your body in different ways.

Another type of scan can give new, different information than a test you already had. Also, your radiologist can see something on one kind of scan, but not on another. Your doctor will decide the next steps in your treatment.

## **Why did the radiologist recommend close-interval follow-up imaging in my report?**

Many scans show results that are not important to your health. We learn if it's important by repeating a test. We often will ask you to get another scan either weeks or months later.

The second scan can tell us if the lesion grew or changed. A lesion that does not grow or change is less of a concern than one that does. It may not need testing, such as a biopsy (taking tissue samples from the lesion).

## **How is a PET-CT scan different from a CT scan?**

A CT scan uses x-rays to make a detailed view of the inside of your body. The

A PET-CT scan is an imaging procedure that uses radiation from an injected medicine. We use a PET-CT scan to find or check the growth of cancer tumors. We also use it to check the health of your tissues and organs.

The CT part of a PET-CT scan mostly helps your radiologist read the PET scan. CT scans use a very low dose of X-rays to take pictures. These CT pictures are not as clear as the ones from a regular CT scan. Your doctor may order a different kind of CT scan to get more information.

## **Should I be worried about radiation exposure from my CT or PET-CT scan?**

A scan uses a very small amount of radiation to let your radiologist see the inside of your body. The dose of radiation is at the lowest level possible to make the images your radiologist needs. Your doctor ordered the scan because its benefits are greater than the very small risk caused by the radiation. Visit

[www.radiologyinfo.org/patient-safety](http://www.radiologyinfo.org/patient-safety) to learn more about radiation doses.

## **My report's impression section does not mention everything that's in the findings section. Why?**

Radiology scans, such as CTs and MRIs, show thousands of details inside the body. Radiologists are doctors trained to recognize signs of disease or good health in different kinds of scans.

In the Findings section, they write their observations (findings) about items that may interest the doctor who ordered the test. In the Impression section, they give a summary of their findings. They choose the ones that are most important to your doctors so they can make decisions about your treatment.

## **On follow-up scans, a different radiologist often re-measures the size of a lesion. Why do they get different measurements of the same lesion?**

Measurements in radiology are not perfect. A lesion often has an uneven shape, fuzzy borders, or a different position. We expect to see slight differences in measurements. They usually are not big enough to need changes in your treatment plan.

## **Why do my radiology reports from MSK look different from my reports from my other healthcare providers?**

Reports from MSK look different from other radiology providers' reports, which have many paragraphs. At MSK, we use a special format called standardized reporting. Each of the more than 300 different types of imaging studies performed at MSK has its own format. It shows the results that are most important to your care plan. Our reports are easier to read and understand, and are more consistent.

## **What do the numbers at the end of my report mean?**

Every MSK radiology report has numbers printed at the bottom, called a standardized certainty lexicon. Our radiologists estimate the probability (chance) that you have a diagnosis. The numbers tell you whether it's likely a lesion could be a health problem. We don't do these estimates for breast scans.

Consistent with	Greater than 90%
Suspicious for/Probable/Probably	About 75%
Possible/Possibly	About 50%
Less likely	About 25%

Unlikely	Less than 10%
	© MSKCC 2012

If you have any questions about your radiology test results, please contact your MSK healthcare provider.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

Frequently Asked Questions About Viewing Your Radiology Test Results - Last updated on November 20, 2023

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center