New Scanner Makes MRI More Comfortable, Accessible

Many people feel anxious during a magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI, scan. MRI uses strong magnets and radio waves to create detailed pictures of the body to help doctors diagnose medical problems. Patients having the test must lie still for long periods in a noisy scanner. This can be hard for children and the elderly; bariatric patients; and people with claustrophobia, pain, or mobility or respiratory problems.

Now, patients have another option for MRI at Memorial Hermann Memorial City Medical Center. The hospital recently purchased a state-of-the-art MRI unit with an extra-wide opening, providing more space and comfort during a scan. The new unit is also quieter and shorter — enabling some people to keep their heads out of the machine.

“We’re very excited about the new unit because it enhances our ability to care for a wider range of patients while maintaining exceptional imaging quality,” says Baraa Al-Hafez, M.D., a neurosurgeon affiliated with Memorial City.

The new unit enables Memorial City to expand its pediatric and adult MRI sedation services, which very few facilities in the area offer, says Alla Vargo, service line director for Oncology Services at Memorial City. “It’s not uncommon for patients needing sedation to wait several weeks to have their MRI,” Vargo says. “Now we can schedule these patients within a few days.”

With the new MRI oncology suite application, Memorial City will have the advantage of visualizing diagnoses, particularly the spread of cancer cells. Additionally, the hospital now offers MR spectroscopy (MRS) — a noninvasive test measuring metabolic changes in the brain — and colorectal imaging. Colorectal MRI is highly accurate in identifying tumors and their margins and provides important information for treatment planning purposes, especially in patients with advanced rectal cancer. Memorial City is the only facility in west Houston to offer colorectal MRI on an inpatient and outpatient basis.

“Patients and their doctors are always seeking new technologies that help them better diagnose, evaluate and treat disease,” says Dr. Al-Hafez. “This equipment is an investment in our community’s health.”
Board Certification: What Does It Mean?

All physicians must be licensed to practice medicine. But some go a step further and become “board certified” in their fields. Becoming board certified is a way for physicians to let patients know they’re up to date on the most current knowledge and techniques relating to their specialty or subspecialty.

To become board certified, doctors must first complete a rigorous written test. Sometimes, they are also asked to give an oral presentation highlighting their expertise. After becoming board certified, they must enroll in the Maintenance of Certification program through the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) if they wish to stay certified. A doctor of osteopathic medicine (D.O.) may choose to be board certified in his or her specialty through the ABMS or through the American Osteopathic Association (AOA).

Through these programs, physicians are periodically tested on a variety of “core competencies” to make sure they still meet the criteria for board certification. These include medical knowledge, patient care and professionalism.

It’s important to note that if your physician isn’t board certified, that doesn’t mean he or she is not qualified. Before even thinking about becoming board certified, doctors must first complete four years of premedical education, receive an M.D. or D.O. degree from a qualified medical school and have three to five years of full-time experience in a residency training program.

There are many specialties that simply aren’t recognized by the ABMS or the AOA for board certification. There are also new board certifications added periodically. Christina Pramudji, M.D., a board-certified urologist affiliated with Memorial Hermann Memorial City Medical Center, provides one example. Dr. Pramudji was already board certified in urology, but recently received board certification in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery when the ABMS first began offering that subspecialty certification in 2013.

“Over the last several years, the focus and interest of my practice has become almost exclusively female urology and urogynecology,” Dr. Pramudji explains. “I jumped at the chance to earn a subspecialty board certification that reflects my unique qualifications, training and expertise in this area of surgical medicine. This helps reassure patients with incontinence and pelvic floor prolapse conditions that they are seeing a qualified specialist.”

Interventional radiology, pediatric anesthesia, and hospice and palliative medicine are also relatively new board subspecialty certifications that physicians at Memorial City have earned.

To find out more about board certification, or to find out if your doctor is board certified, visit the websites of the American Board of Medical Specialties (abms.org) or the American Osteopathic Association (osteopathic.org).
You crawl into bed, ready to relax. But your legs won’t settle down. You feel burning, tugging or crawling sensations deep inside your calves. Yet they ease up when you move your legs. You may even feel them during the day while sitting. Sound familiar? If so, you could have restless legs syndrome (RLS). Read on to learn how to separate truth from fiction when it comes to this problem.

Stress is the primary cause of restless legs. **FALSE.** RLS is a neurological disorder that is probably caused by many factors. These include genes, low iron levels and health conditions such as diabetes and kidney failure. It affects more women than men and becomes more common with age.

“Pregnancy boosts the risk for this condition,” explains board-certified neurologist Raja Mehanna, M.D., who specializes in movement disorders and is affiliated with Memorial Hermann Memorial City Medical Center. “Fortunately, in these cases, symptoms usually fade within the first month after giving birth.”

An ice pack is better than a heating pad for easing RLS. **FALSE.** Neither heat nor cold therapy has a leg up on RLS. Some people find relief by taking a hot bath or using a heating pad, while an ice pack or a cold bath works better for others. Massaging your legs and doing some stretches also might help.

**Moderate exercise can help prevent symptoms. TRUE.** Other tips to help give restless legs the boot:
- Maintain a regular sleep schedule.
- Keep your mind busy with a good book when you must stay seated, such as when you’re flying.
- Steer clear of alcohol, tobacco and caffeine.
- See your doctor if you can’t kick the symptoms on your own. While there is no cure, treatment can control symptoms and improve sleep.

Unfortunately, diagnosing RLS isn’t so easy. There is no single blood test or exam that can determine if you have the condition. Instead, your doctor will rely largely on the signs and symptoms you report. “Your doctor will combine this information with a physical exam and test results, such as a blood test to measure your iron levels, to find out whether RLS is to blame,” says Dr. Mehanna.

Consider bringing to your appointment a list of your symptoms and medications, as well as a sleep diary in which you record how much daily sleep you get. Having this information can make it easier for your doctor to arrive at a diagnosis.
Hospitals can be scary places, especially for children having a medical procedure that requires sedation or anesthesia. Many kids, especially very young children, may have fears about “going to sleep,” being separated from their parents during their operation and how they’ll feel when they wake up.

Specialized Training and Skills
At Children’s Memorial Hermann Memorial City, you can be confident your child needing anesthesia will receive the very best care. The pediatric surgical team includes a board-certified pediatric anesthesiologist. Pediatric anesthesiologists are fully trained anesthesiologists with at least one additional year of specialized training in pediatrics. They are uniquely qualified to provide the safest care for children needing sedation, anesthesia and pain control.

“Children are not small adults,” says Christopher Duperier, M.D., MPH, a pediatric anesthesiologist affiliated with Children’s Memorial Hermann Memorial City. “Their anatomy and physiology are different than adults’, and they respond differently to anesthesia. This is why it’s so important that they receive care from professionals who know how to meet their very special needs.”

High-Level Care Close to Home
Dr. Duperier says it’s less common to find board-certified pediatric anesthesiologists at community hospitals. Most work at large academic medical centers and children’s hospitals. Pediatric anesthesiologists administer general anesthesia in the operating room and control children’s pain after surgery. They may be called to sedate children having diagnostic imaging tests when they are anxious or can’t stay still. Pediatric anesthesiologists also assist in such areas as the Emergency Center, cardiology and the neonatal intensive care unit.

The type of pediatric sedation used at Children’s Memorial Hermann Memorial City depends on many factors, including the child’s age, height and weight; the type of procedure being performed; and the child’s medical condition, Dr. Duperier says. A child may be given a liquid to drink, a special mask to breathe through or medication delivered through a vein.

Focusing on the Positive
In every setting, pediatric anesthesiologists and nurses focus on the comfort and safety of their young patients. Children arriving for surgery at Children’s Memorial Hermann Memorial City often bring a favorite toy. When they don’t, the staff supplies a teddy bear. Youngsters can peddle into the operating area in toy cars provided by the hospital. They can also pick the “flavor” for their breathing mask. The choices include bubblegum, cherry, lemon and peppermint.

“At Children’s Memorial Hermann Memorial City, we have a dedicated team of pediatric specialists who provide great care,” Dr. Duperier says. “Our focus is on making the hospital experience as positive for children and their families as possible. Memorial City is committed to providing the most highly trained physicians to provide care for your children.”
Taking Minimally Invasive Weight Loss Surgery to the Next Level

If you’re considering weight loss surgery, one option your doctor may have discussed with you is gastric sleeve surgery – also known as a sleeve gastrectomy. Gastric sleeve surgery helps people lose weight by making the stomach smaller. The procedure typically is performed as minimally invasive surgery, with small incisions, so patients have less postoperative pain and a faster recovery than with traditional open surgery.

Now doctors affiliated with Memorial Hermann Memorial City Medical Center are using new technology that makes minimally invasive gastric sleeve surgery even less invasive. Instead of operating through five or six small incisions in the abdomen, surgeons at the hospital can now perform the procedure through one tiny incision around the belly button. Most people will have no visible scar.

“People having surgery understandably want to have the least amount of scarring possible,” says Jorge Leiva, M.D., FACS, FASMBS, a bariatric surgeon affiliated with Memorial City. “With single-incision laparoscopic surgery, patients enjoy all the benefits of minimally invasive surgery with an even better cosmetic result.”

Smaller Stomach, Big Results
Sleeve gastrectomy is bariatric surgery to remove a large portion of the patient’s stomach. The surgeon then creates a smaller, tube-shaped stomach. This limits the amount of food that can be eaten at one time, and patients feel full faster.

To perform single-incision gastric sleeve surgery, doctors at Memorial City use a special device called the SPIDER© Surgical System. The doctor first inserts the device through the opening in the belly button. Once inside, the system opens up like an umbrella, enabling the surgeon to operate with tiny, flexible instruments. When the surgery is complete, the doctor removes the SPIDER© system through the same opening. Dr. Leiva says the procedure takes 90 minutes or less, and patients usually leave the hospital the next day.

Leading the Way
Dr. Leiva is one of approximately 20 laparoscopic surgeons in the United States and only two in the Houston metropolitan area performing gastric sleeves with the SPIDER© Surgical System. He also performs single-incision robotic gallbladder surgery at Memorial City.

“A basic skill set is required to do single-incision surgery,” Dr. Leiva says. “A lot of surgeons have tried to do it and given up because it’s not easy to do. There’s a learning curve. But a lot of us believe single-incision surgery is the way surgery will increasingly be performed in the future. It’s definitely revolutionary.”

Dr. Leiva is a board-certified bariatric and general surgeon.
Dr. Baraa Al-Hafez is a neurosurgeon with expertise in spine and cranial surgery. He attended medical school at Tishreen University Medical School in Syria and completed a two-year postdoctoral research fellowship at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City. After the fellowship, he completed an internship in general surgery and started his neurosurgery residency at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock. Dr. Al-Hafez completed his neurosurgery residency at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. He is fluent in both English and Arabic.

Dr. Chris Duperier is board certified in internal medicine, anesthesiology and pediatric anesthesiology. He received his medical degree from Louisiana State University-New Orleans School of Medicine and completed his anesthesia residency at Brigham and Women’s Hospital-Harvard Medical School in Boston. Dr. Duperier went on to complete a pediatric fellowship at Texas Children’s Hospital in Houston. He has a master’s degree in public health policy and management from Emory University.

Dr. Jorge Leiva is a board-certified bariatric and general surgeon. He received his medical degree at the University of San Luis Potosí in Mexico and completed his residency at Christus St. Joseph Hospital in Houston. Dr. Leiva is a fellow of the American College of Surgeons and the American Society of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery. He has been in practice in the Houston area for over 11 years and is very involved in robotic and single-incision surgery. Dr. Leiva is married and the father of four children. He is fluent in both English and Spanish.

Dr. Raja Mehanna is a board-certified neurologist. He received his medical degree at St. Joseph University School of Medicine in Beirut, Lebanon, and completed his residency at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Dr. Mehanna went on to receive his fellowship in movement disorders at Baylor College of Medicine and the Cleveland Clinic in Cleveland, Ohio. He is fluent in English, French and Arabic.

Dr. Christina Pramudji is a board-certified urologist and female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgeon. She completed her residency at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Dr. Pramudji is a diplomate of the American Board of Urology, with subspecialty certification in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery. She is a member of the American Urological Association, Texas Medical Association and the Harris County Medical Society.

Dr. Boris Sepesi is a board-certified general surgeon, fellowship trained in cardiothoracic surgery. He earned his medical degree with honors from Jagiellonian University Medical College in Krakow, Poland. He completed an internship and residency in general surgery at the University of Rochester Medical Center in Rochester, New York. He then completed a clinical fellowship in cardiothoracic surgery at MD Anderson Cancer Center/Methodist Hospital. Dr. Sepesi is an assistant professor in the department of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

Did you know you can schedule imaging, mammography, colonoscopy, ER and some primary care visits online using ScheduleNow? Go to memorialhermann.org and book your appointment today!
For more information on any of the events below, or to register, call 713.222.CARE (2273), unless otherwise noted.

**SEMINARS, EVENTS AND SCREENINGS**

**Digestive Health Seminars**
March 26, 6 to 7 p.m. – Colon Health
April 8, 6 to 7:30 p.m. – Heartburn/GERD
May 14, 6 to 7:30 p.m. – Heartburn/GERD
A nutritionist will be on hand at all three seminars to discuss diet modifications.
To register, call 713.222.CARE (2273).

**Joint Pain Seminar**
April 16, 6 to 7 p.m. – Ankle & Foot Pain
To register, call 713.222.CARE (2273).
Refreshments provided.

**NewStart Weight Loss Surgery Seminars**
These FREE seminars are for morbidly obese people with a body mass index of 30 or more who are interested in learning about metabolic and weight loss surgery. The seminars are available in person or online. Visit mhnwstart.org and select “Get Started” or call 713.242.4600 for details.

**OB/Maternity Facility Tours**
Tours of the facility are held regularly. Registration is required.

**CLASSES**

**Breastfeeding Class**
Teaches expectant parents techniques to make breastfeeding a successful, satisfying experience. Cost: $30 per couple.

**CPR for Infants**
Teaches basic techniques used in the event of foreign-body airway obstruction (choking) in infants. Cost: $15 per person; $30 per couple.

**Cancer Basics – Starting Your Cancer Journey**
This is a class for newly diagnosed cancer patients and their families to answer questions and help cope with what lies ahead. This class meets the third Monday of the month, from 3 to 4 p.m. at Memorial Hermann Cancer Center-Memorial City located in Medical Plaza 4. To register, please call 713.222.CARE (2273).

**Look Good, Feel Better**
Teaches beauty techniques to women cancer patients in active treatment to help them combat the appearance-related side effects of cancer treatment. This class meets the second Monday of the month, from 2 to 4 p.m. at Memorial Hermann Cancer Center-Memorial City located in Medical Plaza 4. To register, please call 713.222.CARE (2273).

**Newborn Care Class**
Teaches prospective parents the fundamentals of infant care. Cost: $30 per couple.

**Chair Yoga Classes**
Meets every Wednesday from 3 to 4 p.m. in the Bunker Hill Conference Center. No reservation is required; walk-ins are welcome.

**Prepared Childbirth Class**
Prepares expectant parents for their childbirth experience. OB tour is included. Cost: $70 per couple.

**SUPPORT GROUPS**

**Better Breathers**
Meets the second Wednesday of every month, 4 to 5 p.m. Call 713.242.3555.

**Breast Cancer**
Meets the third Tuesday of every month, 6 to 7:30 p.m. For more details, call 713.242.3395. Location: West Pavilion, Main Conference Center.

**Diabetes**
Meets the second Thursday of the month, eight times per year, 7 to 8:30 p.m. For more information, call 713.242.3890. Location: West Pavilion, Frostwood Boardroom.

**Techniques for Stress Relief**
This interactive, experiential program teaches techniques on how to effectively combat stress and ease tension during one’s cancer journey. The group meets the fourth Wednesday of every month, from 2 to 3 p.m. in the Bunker Hill Conference Room.

**Mended Hearts**
Meets the fourth Tuesday of every month, 6 to 7:30 p.m. To learn more, call 713.242.4813. Location: West Pavilion, Main Conference Center.

**Stroke**
Meets the first Tuesday of every month, 11 a.m. to noon. Call 713.242.2906. Location: East Tower, 4th Floor, Neuroscience Conference Room.

**Weight Loss Surgery**
Meets the first Wednesday of every month, 7 to 9 p.m. Call 713.242.4600. Location: West Pavilion, Main Conference Center.
Experts expected that 230,000 Americans would be diagnosed with lung cancer in 2013. Early detection and treatment are key to fighting the disease. But many patients do not find out they have lung cancer until a routine chest X-ray reveals the presence of lung nodules – abnormal growths on the lung. Most nodules are not cancerous, but waiting to find out can be a source of stress for patients.

Memorial Hermann Cancer Center-Memorial City is tackling these problems with its undiagnosed lung nodule clinic. The clinic relies on a multidisciplinary approach, advanced imaging technology and minimally invasive procedures to identify and treat patients with lung nodules. The aim is to provide timely and accurate answers so the patient can move forward, whatever the diagnosis.

“It is very exciting to be a part of this new, collaborative multidisciplinary team approach to provide early answers for patients with lung cancer nodules,” says Boris Sepesi, M.D., a thoracic oncologic surgeon with MD Anderson at Memorial City. “The goal is for most patients to be able to receive diagnostic testing, diagnosis, staging and consultation, with potentially a treatment plan, the same day as their first appointment.”

Time is crucial when it comes to lung cancer. The earlier it is found, the more treatment options there are – and the better the outcome. With Memorial City’s lung nodule clinic, lung cancer can be diagnosed before symptoms begin. Imaging techniques such as a CT (computed tomography) or PET (positron emission tomography) scan can help with diagnosis, but a pathologist must confirm the diagnosis after examining a tissue specimen.

If lung cancer is found, the multidisciplinary team meets to discuss the best path of care for the patient, who is then referred for treatment. If the nodule is benign, the patient is monitored for any future warning signs of lung cancer.