

Talking to your doctor about your radiology report

Thanks to technological advances and recent legislation, radiology exam reports are increasingly available via electronic health records and patient portal systems. As a result, you may see the report before your doctor has a chance to review it.

It's important to remember that your radiology report is not written for you – it is written for your doctor. As a result, trying to understand your report – and its medical terminology – can be challenging (see the How to Read Your Radiology Report (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/all-about-your-radiology-report>) page). It may even cause you scanxiety, a term coined to discuss the stress and worry that may accompany a radiology exam (see the Scanxiety (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/article-scanxiety>) page).



Try not to make any assumptions about what the report says or means. Instead, focus on preparing to meet with your doctor to discuss the results.

The Diagnostic Question

Your doctor prescribed your radiology exam to answer a diagnostic question. The doctor will review the report within the context of your past and current medical history and explain what the next step is for your care.

As you review your report, write down any questions or concerns you have. Take these questions with you when you meet with your doctor to discuss your results. Organize your questions to make the best use of your appointment time and eliminate any questions that don't or won't help explain your results.

It's helpful to organize your questions accordingly:

- A. Exam findings
- B. What the radiologist put in the impression section of your report
- C. Next steps

Exam Findings

Certainly, your most pressing question is a simple one: what did the exam find? What are the results? Your exam may have found nothing at all. Or the findings may be inconclusive or even incidental. Incidental findings are things a radiologist detects on your imaging study that are often asymptomatic and have no impact in your care. Sometimes, incidental findings can be significant and result in a change of care for yourself so it is important to ask your ordering doctor if a finding is concerning. Some centers may also allow you to speak with the radiologist to get their input on if they are concerned about a finding or not.

Report Impression

The doctor will tell you if they have a complete understanding of your condition. The impression the radiologist makes when interpreting your test may confirm the doctor's initial diagnosis, or they may rule it out.

Next Steps

Based on the exam findings, your doctor may want to start treatment for your condition. If the findings were inconclusive or incidental, they may want to do more tests. Incidental findings often require different medical imaging techniques to better describe what the first test found.

If the doctor wants to do more testing, ask them to explain what they hope to find. This will help prepare you for the upcoming exam and your next discussion of the results report.

Disclaimer

This information is copied from the RadiologyInfo Web site (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org>) which is dedicated to providing the highest quality information. To ensure that, each section is reviewed by a physician with expertise in the area presented. All information contained in the Web site is further reviewed by an ACR (American College of Radiology) - RSNA (Radiological Society of North America) committee, comprising physicians with expertise in several radiologic areas.

However, it is not possible to assure that this Web site contains complete, up-to-date information on any particular subject. Therefore, ACR and RSNA make no representations or warranties about the suitability of this information for use for any particular purpose. All information is provided "as is" without express or implied warranty.

Please visit the RadiologyInfo Web site at <http://www.radiologyinfo.org> to view or download the latest information.

Note: Images may be shown for illustrative purposes. Do not attempt to draw conclusions or make diagnoses by comparing these images to other medical images, particularly your own. Only qualified physicians should interpret images; the radiologist is the physician expert trained in medical imaging.

Copyright

This material is copyrighted by either the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA), 820 Jorie Boulevard, Oak Brook, IL 60523-2251 or the American College of Radiology (ACR), 1891 Preston White Drive, Reston, VA 20191-4397. Commercial reproduction or multiple distribution by any traditional or electronically based reproduction/publication method is prohibited.

Copyright ® 2026 Radiological Society of North America, Inc.