Orthopantomogram (OPG)

Your doctor has recommended that you have an orthopantomogram (OPG). The reason for this will depend on your condition; your doctor will talk to you about your options. This leaflet explains the procedure and aims to answer the main questions you’re likely to have. If you have any additional questions then please feel free to talk about them with your doctor, nurse or radiographer before the procedure.

What is an orthopantomogram?
An orthopantomogram is an X-ray image of your whole mouth, including your upper and lower jaw and teeth. The X-ray machine moves around your head while taking the image. This provides a complete ear to ear image of your mouth and teeth. It is used to:

- look at impacted wisdom teeth
- help find the cause of dental pain
- view the position of dental implants
- help assess teeth for orthodontic treatment

Preparing for your orthopantomogram

Before the procedure can take place, you will need to remove glasses, dentures and any jewellery from your head and neck (such as earrings and necklaces) as well as any hairclips.

You must tell your doctor or radiographer if you are, or think you could be, pregnant as X-rays aren’t recommended for pregnant women unless there is an urgent medical reason.

About the procedure

The orthopantomogram will be carried out by a radiographer (a health professional trained to perform imaging procedures). He or she will explain the procedure and make sure that you’re happy to go ahead with it. You will be asked to stand in front of the X-ray machine. A peg will be put into a slot on the machine and you’ll be asked to bite onto this. Below the peg are two handles which you’ll need to hold to keep your balance as we may need to ask you to lean backwards to get the best possible picture. When you are in the right position, the radiographer will use a clamp to gently hold your head in place and stop it from moving. This doesn’t hurt. Once you are in place, the machine starts to move around your head. It usually makes a strange noise. While it is moving it can touch your shoulders. Try not to move as this will blur the image and may mean the procedure has to be repeated.

The test usually takes about 15 to 20 minutes, but altogether you will be in the radiology department for approximately 30 minutes.

Getting your results

A report will be sent to the doctor who requested your test. This can take several days. He or she will discuss the results with you at your next appointment.
What are the risks?

Orthopantomograms are commonly performed and generally safe. However, in order to make an informed decision and give your consent, you need to be aware of the possible risks. You will be exposed to some X-ray radiation but the amount you receive isn’t considered to be harmful. The level of exposure will depend on the procedure. Talk to your doctor or radiologist for more information. Pregnant women are advised not to have X-rays as there’s a risk the radiation may harm their unborn baby. If you are, or could be, pregnant then please tell your doctor or radiographer.

Contact

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact the Diagnostic Imaging department on +44 (0)20 7460 5746/7 or fax +44 (0)20 7835 2496. The department is open from 8.00am to 8.00pm Monday to Friday and 9.00am to 2.00pm on Saturday.

Please be punctual for your appointment. If you cannot keep your appointment then contact us immediately.