How to Prepare: X-Ray

Plain X-rays need almost no preparation — these few points cover nearly everything:

- ☐ Wear loose, comfortable clothes without metal over the area being X-rayed — zips, buttons, underwired bras, belts and jewellery can show on the picture and mean a repeat. You may be asked to change into a gown.
- ☐ Remove jewellery, watches, glasses and hair clips near the area beforehand, and expect to be asked about piercings.
- ☐ Tell the radiographer if there is any chance you could be pregnant. Many X-rays can still be done safely with shielding or an adapted technique, but the team needs to know before, not after.
- ☐ For most plain X-rays you can eat, drink and take medicines as normal — exceptions will be stated in your appointment letter.
- ☐ Bring your request form or referral details, and tell the team about recent similar X-rays — previous pictures are often useful for comparison and can prevent repeats.
- ☐ If pain makes standing or lying in position difficult, say so: there are supports and alternative positions, and pictures can often be taken sitting or in a wheelchair.

What to expect

Before	The radiographer checks your details and the request, explains which pictures are needed, and positions you — standing against a frame, sitting, or lying on a table, depending on the body part. The area is lined up carefully with a light marker; positioning takes longer than the picture itself.
During	For each picture you are asked to keep very still, and for chest X-rays to take a deep breath in and hold it for a few seconds. The radiographer steps behind a screen — they can still see and hear you — and takes the exposure, which is silent and painless.
After	There is no recovery: you get dressed and can go straight home or back to the ward. X-rays do not make you radioactive.

Medically reviewed by Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim, MD, PhD — physician-scientist. Last reviewed October 2026.

This handout is general information to help you prepare; it does not replace the instructions from your own care team. If your clinic gave you different instructions, follow theirs.