
Radiologists Develop Asthma Imaging Method



Radiologists have developed a new method for viewing the lungs of asthma sufferers. The method uses a polarised helium-3 gas--making it visible during an MRI. The patient inhales the helium-3 and undergoes an MRI, where doctors can see how far the atoms in the gas can travel in the lungs. This gives an image of what airways are blocked and what parts of the lungs ventilate. The black areas of the image indicate portions of the lung where air does not reach - areas where the helium-3 atoms could not travel.

The new method combines MRI scans with a harmless gas called helium-3. It's not the helium found in balloons, but a special gas that is visible inside the lungs when inhaled during an MRI scan. The images show in the healthy lung how helium-3 atoms move and completely fill the lungs. In asthma patients, areas of the lungs are blocked so the atoms may not fill the lung at all.

Doctors hope the technique will help develop new ways to prevent, treat and cure asthma.

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