

CT: Calcium-Scoring Scan

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how a calcium-scoring CT scan works, how to prepare, how it is done, what to expect during the scan, and how you will get your results.

What is a CT calcium-scoring scan?

CT stands for *computed tomography*. A CT scan of the chest uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures of the organs and tissues in your chest. CT can show many types of tissue, such as the lungs, heart, bones, soft tissue, muscle and blood vessels.

Calcium scoring checks how much calcium is in the main blood vessels of your heart. The higher the score, the more calcium is present.

How does the scan work?

In a CT scan, many X-ray beams are passed through your chest from many angles. The X-ray tube revolves around you, and takes many pictures, forming cross-section images (*slices*) of your heart. Your doctor will view the pictures on a computer.

How do I prepare?

- Keep taking your prescribed medicines as usual.
- *Women:* Tell your provider if you are pregnant.

On the Day of Your Scan

- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes.
- We may ask you to remove any jewelry or tops with metal zippers or snaps. These items may affect the scan.
- *Women:* If there is any chance you may be pregnant, tell the CT technologist **before** the scan begins.



For your scan, the technologist will help you get into position on the CT table.



A CT image of the heart

How is the scan done?

- The CT technologist will help you lie on your back on the CT table. We may use pillows to help you hold the right position for the scan.
- The technologist will then leave the room. You will be alone during the scan, but the technologist can see and hear you, and can speak to you at any time through an intercom.
- You will lie still while the table moves into the center of the scanner. You will also need to hold still when the scans are being done. Holding still during the scan results in the best images.
- For the first few scans, the table will move quickly through the scanner. These first scans check the correct starting position. For the rest of the scans, the table moves more slowly through the scanner.
- After the CT scan is done, you may have to wait a short time while the radiologist checks the scans for quality. A few more scans may be done, if needed.
- The procedure usually takes about 15 to 30 minutes, including set-up time. The actual scan time takes less than 30 seconds.
- Because CT uses X-rays, you may not have a family member or friend in the CT room during the scan.

What will I feel during the scan?

- CT scans do not cause any pain.
- During the scan, the technologist will ask you to hold your breath for about 30 seconds while the CT images are taken. This helps provide clear images. If you cannot hold your breath, the technologist will ask you to breathe quietly and slowly.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in CT scanning will review and interpret the CT images. The radiologist will not talk with you about the results. The radiologist will send a detailed report to your primary care provider or referring doctor. Your own provider will talk with you about the results of your scan.

You may also read your results on your MyChart page. If you need copies of your images on disc, call 206.598.6206.

You and your provider will decide the next step, such as treatment for a problem, as needed.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- UWMC - Montlake Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- UW Roosevelt Radiology: 206.598.6868
- Harborview Imaging Services: 206.744.3105
- UWMC - Northwest Imaging Services CT: 206.668.2061