

CT: Chest Scan

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how a chest CT scan works, how to prepare for it, what to expect during the scan, and how to get your results.

What is a chest CT 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 of the chest. CT can show many types of tissue, such as lungs, heart, bones, soft tissues, muscle, and blood vessels.

How does it work?

For the scan, you will lie on a table inside the CT machine. Many X-ray beams will be passed through your body as the X-ray tube revolves around you.

The machine will take pictures from many angles, forming cross-section images (*slices*) of the area. Your doctor will view the images on a computer screen.

Contrast

Some patients will receive *contrast* (X-ray dye) during their CT scan. Contrast makes tissues and blood vessels easier to see in the images.

How should 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 clothing.
- It is OK to eat a light meal before your scan.
- Drink plenty of fluids.



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



A CT image of the chest

Before the Scan

- **Women:** If there is any chance you may be pregnant, tell the CT technologist **before** the scan begins.
- Some items can affect the CT images. We may ask you to remove:
 - Any clothing with zippers or snaps
 - Hairpins, jewelry, glasses, hearing aids, and removable dental work

If You Will Receive Contrast

- Before your scan, the CT technologist will ask you if you:
 - Are allergic to any medicines or iodine. Many types of contrast contain iodine. If you have had an allergic reaction to contrast in the past, we will ask you to take a medicine before your scan to prevent a reaction to the contrast.
 - Have asthma, diabetes, a heart problem, multiple myeloma, or kidney disease. These conditions may increase your risk of having a reaction to the contrast. For example, kidney disease makes it harder for your body to remove contrast from your bloodstream.
- We will place a small *intravenous* (IV) tube into your arm vein. This will be done before you enter the scanning room.

Can a family member or friend stay with me during the scan?

- CT scans use X-rays. Because of this, you may not have a family member or friend in the CT room during the exam.
- For young patients, a parent may be able to stay in the room with their child to help ease fear and give comfort. The parent must wear a lead apron to limit exposure to the radiation used in the scan.

How is the scan done?

- The CT technologist will help you get into position on the CT table. We will use pillows to help you hold the best position for the scan.
- If you are receiving contrast, it will be injected through your IV.
- The technologist will then leave the room. You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the technologist can see, hear, and speak with you through an intercom at all times.
- You must lie still while the table moves into the center of the scanner. You must also 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 to check the correct starting position. The rest of the scans are made as the table moves more slowly through the scanner.
- Each time a scan is done, the technologist will ask you to hold your breath for about 20 seconds. If you cannot hold your breath for that long, the technologist will ask you to breathe quietly and slowly.
- The procedure usually takes 15 to 30 minutes, including setup time. The actual scan time takes less than 30 seconds.
- After the scans are done, we may ask you to wait a short time while we check the scans for quality. If needed, we may do more scans.

What will I feel during the scan?

CT scans do not cause any pain. You may feel some discomfort from lying still on the scan table.

If a contrast injection is used:

- You may feel discomfort at the injection site.
- You may feel warm or flushed when the contrast is injected. You may also notice a metallic taste in your mouth. These reactions are normal. They will ease within 1 to 2 minutes.
- Once in a while, a patient gets itching and hives for up to a few hours after receiving contrast. Tell us if this happens to you. We will give you medicine to treat the symptoms.
- If you become light-headed or short of breath, tell us **right away**. You may be having an allergic reaction. A doctor or nurse will be nearby during the scan to help, if 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

What should I do after the scan?

If you received contrast, drink a lot of fluids after your scan. This will help your kidneys flush the contrast from your body.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in reading CTs will review and interpret the CT images. The radiologist will not talk with you about the results. The radiologist will send a report to the provider who referred you for the scan. Your own provider will talk with you about your results.

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.