

CT: Computed Tomography Scan

How to prepare and what to expect



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

What is a CT scan?

CT stands for *computed tomography*. A CT scan uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures of the inside of your body. CT scans show many types of tissues, organs, and bones.



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How does the scan work?

You will lie on a table inside the CT machine for the scan. An X-ray tube will revolve around you.

Many X-ray beams will be passed through your body, creating cross-section images (*slices*) of the area being scanned. The Radiologist (a doctor who specializes in radiology) will view these images on a computer screen.

Contrast

You may be given *contrast* (X-ray dye). As the contrast moves through your blood vessels and your internal organs, it makes these tissues easier for the doctor to see in the images.

Contrast may be given through an *intravenous* (IV) tube in your vein, by mouth, or as an *enema* (injected into the rectum).

How should I prepare?

- Keep taking your prescribed medicines as usual.
- *Women:* Tell your provider if you are pregnant.
- Drink plenty of nonalcoholic fluids.
- **IMPORTANT:** If you are having anesthesia or sedation on the day of your CT Exam, please follow the nurse's instructions for not eating, drinking, or taking medications after midnight.



During your scan, you will lie on a table inside a CT machine.

On the Day of Your Scan

- It is OK to eat a light meal (low-fat, non-fried) before your scan.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.
- We recommend that you do not wear jewelry.

Before the Scan Begins

- *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

- You will be asked to fill out a screening form either online or before your CT exam to determine if it's safe to receive contrast for your exam. We will place an IV tube into your arm vein. We will use this IV tube to give you contrast. This will be done before you enter the scanning room.
- Before your scan, the CT technologist will verify it is safe for you to receive contrast.
- If you've received contrast in the past and had an allergic reaction, you may need to take medication before receiving contrast.
- If you are having a CT scan of the gastrointestinal (digestive) tract, we will ask you to drink oral contrast.

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 scan.

What can I expect during the scan?

- The technologist will help you get into position on the CT table. The table will move into the CT scanner.
- If you are having IV contrast, an injection of IV contrast will be given after your scan is set up.
- The technologist will leave the room while the pictures are being taken. The technologist can see, hear, and speak with you through an intercom.
- You will be asked to hold still while the pictures are being acquired.
- Depending on the exam, a CT scan usually takes 5 to 30 minutes. When the scan is over, we may ask you to wait 30 minutes after the contrast is given to ensure you don't need any follow-up care.



A CT image of the abdomen.

What will I feel during the scan?

If you receive **IV contrast** for your scan:

- You may feel warm or flushed when the contrast is injected. You may also have a metallic taste in your mouth. These reactions are normal. They should ease within 1 to 2 minutes after the contrast has been injected.
- If you take the contrast by mouth, you may find the taste mildly unpleasant.
- We may give you the contrast by enema if the scan includes your colon.
- If you start to feel light-headed or short of breath, let the technologist know right away.

What should I do after the scan?

If you were given IV contrast for your exam, drink plenty of fluids to help flush the contrast out of your body.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist will read your images and generate a report. This report will be sent to your provider who ordered the exam. It may also be uploaded into your MyChart.

If you have any questions about your results or need any further information, please contact your provider or team.

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

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