

CT: Lung Cancer Screening

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how a CT scan for lung cancer works. It includes how to prepare for the scan, what to expect, and how to get your results.

What is CT lung cancer screening?

A *computed tomography* (CT) scan uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures of your body's organs and tissues. A CT that screens for lung cancer shows if you have any *nodules* (lumps) in your lungs that could lead to cancer. Your doctor scheduled this CT because finding lung cancer early gives us a better chance of treating and curing the disease.

Will I be exposed to radiation?

All forms of X-ray use a small amount of radiation to make the images. A screening CT uses a lower dose of radiation than regular CT scans. Talk with your doctor if you have concerns about the radiation involved. You can decide if the benefits of finding lung cancer early outweigh the risks from the low dose of radiation.

The amount of radiation used in a screening CT depends on a person's body size. For most people, the amount of radiation used in this screening CT is less than one third the amount that is used in a regular CT scan.

How does it work?

For the scan, you will lie on a table inside a tube in the CT machine. The table will move and the tube will revolve around you. The machine will take X-ray images of your lungs. Your doctor will review the images on a computer.

How do I prepare?

- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing on the day of your scan.
- Please remove jewelry and anything that has metal in it from your upper body. Metal can affect the quality of the images.



You will lie on a table inside the CT machine during your scan.



A CT image of the chest

- **Women:** Tell your doctor or CT technologist if there is a chance you might be pregnant.

How is the scan done?

- The CT technologist will help you get into position on the CT table.
- The technologist will then leave the room. You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the technologist will be able to see, hear, and speak with you through an intercom at all times.
- The technologist will ask you to hold your breath for short times when the images are taken. Between scans, you can breathe normally.
- You will need to hold very still when the scans are being done. This will help us get the best images.
- For the first few scans, the table will move quickly through the CT machine. These first scans check the correct starting position. The table will move more slowly for the rest of the scans.
- A lung screening CT scan can take up to 10 minutes. We will check the quality of your images before you leave. If needed, we may ask to take more images.
- Because CT uses X-rays, you may not have a family member or friend in the room during the scan.

What will I feel during the scan?

- CT scans are painless.
- You will need to hold your breath and hold very still when the technologist takes images.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A *thoracic radiologist* (a doctor who specializes in diagnosing lung disorders) will review and interpret your CT images. The radiologist will not talk with you about the results. The radiologist will send a detailed report to your own provider or referring doctor, who will give you the results. Seattle Cancer Care Alliance will also send you a letter explaining your results.

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

You and your provider will then 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 Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- UW Roosevelt Radiology: 206.598.6868
- Harborview Imaging Services: 206.744.3105