

CT: Musculoskeletal (MSK) Scan

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains a musculoskeletal (MSK) CT scan. It describes how CT works, how to prepare for your scan, what to expect during the scan, and how to get your results.

What is an MSK CT scan?

MSK stands for *musculoskeletal*. CT stands for *computed tomography*. An MSK CT scan uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures of the bones and joints. CT scans show many types of tissues and organs.

How does the MSK CT scan work?

During the scan, you will lie inside the CT machine. Many X-ray beams will be passed through your bones and joints 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 review the pictures on a computer.

Contrast

You may receive contrast (X-ray dye) during your scan. Contrast makes the 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.

The Day of Your Scan

- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing on the day of your scan. Do **not** wear clothing with zippers or snaps. Metal objects can affect the CT images.
- *Women:* If there is any chance you may be pregnant, tell the CT technologist **before** the scan begins.
- We may ask you to remove hairpins, jewelry, glasses, hearing aids, and any removable dental work that could cause problems with the images.



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

How is the scan done?

- The CT technologist will help you get into position on the CT table. We will place pillows to help you hold the correct position during the scan.
- 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 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 CT pictures.
- 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.
- An MSK CT scan usually takes 5 to 30 minutes. When the scan is over, we may ask you to wait while we check the images for quality. If needed, we may do a few more scans.

What will I feel during the scan?

- CT scans do not cause any pain. You may feel some discomfort from needing to hold still during the scans.
- CT scans use X-rays. Because of this, you may not have a family member or friend in the CT room during the scan.
- 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.

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

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in CT scanning will review and interpret your images. The radiologist will not talk with you about the results. The radiologist will send a detailed report to your provider, who will give you the 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.