



Information for patients having a CT scan

The leaflet tells you about having a computed tomography (CT) scan. It explains what is involved and what the possible risks are. It is not meant to replace informed discussion between you and your doctor, but can act as a starting point for such a discussion.

What is a CT scan?

A CT scan, is carried out by using a special x-ray machine which produces a cross-section image , or slice of the body. A narrow fan-shaped beam of x-rays is produced from inside the gantry, and rotates in a complete circle around you. The x-rays pass through your body and are detected by electronic sensors on the other side of the gantry, the information passes to a computer which then produces a picture of the internal structure of the body. The pictures are displayed on a TV screen and can be examined by the radiologist. It takes about a second to produce each slice, which can vary in thickness from one millimetre to one centimetre, depending on how much of the body is being scanned.

Who will be doing the CT scan?

A radiographer who is highly trained to carry out x-rays and other imaging procedures and a radiologist who is a doctor specially trained to interpret the images and carry out more complex examinations.

Are there any risks?

CT scanning involves x-rays. Female patients who are or might be pregnant must inform a member of staff in advance. The amount of radiation used is more than an ordinary x-ray of the chest or body and is equal to the natural radiation we receive from the atmosphere over a period of approximately three years.

Many CT examinations involve you having a contrast medium injected into a vein in order to increase the amount of information obtained from the scan. The injection usually results in nothing more than a warm feeling passing around your body.

Despite these slight risks, your doctors believes it is advisable that you should have this examination, and do bear in mind there are greater risks from missing a serious disorder by **not** having it.

Upon collection

The radiographer will explain the procedure for your examination. If you are required to remove clothing you will be shown to a private cubicle. You should point out if you have diabetes, kidney disease, thyroid disease, asthma or any allergies.

What happens during the CT scan?

You will be taken into the special x-ray room and made comfortable lying on the table. Straps and pillows may be used to help maintain the correct position and to hold still during the exam. You may be given an injection of a contrast medium into a vein in your arm. The table will be moved slowly to position the part of your body under investigation within the gantry.

The radiographers will stay in the control room but you will be able to talk to them via an intercom, and they will be watching you all the time. When you enter the CT scanner, special lights may be used to ensure that you are properly positioned. With modern CT scanners, you will only hear slight buzzing, clicking and whirring sounds as the CT scanner revolves during the course of the procedure.

During the scan, you may be asked to hold your breath or not swallow while the images are being produced. However, if you feel any discomfort or apprehension, please mention it immediately to the radiographer.

How long will it take?

If you are given fluid to drink on arrival, you might have to wait an hour before entering the scanning room. The scanning process will then take about 20 minutes.

Are there any side-effects?

Not usually, although you might need to visit the toilet again. You can drive home afterwards and may return to work as necessary.

Can you eat and drink afterwards?

Yes.

When will you get the results?

The images will be examined after your visit and a written report on the findings sent to your referring doctor which is normally available in 3 days.