

# CT (Computed Tomography) Scan

## *How to prepare and what to expect*

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



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this handout.*

## How does a CT scan work?

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.

You will lie on a table inside the CT machine for the scan. An X-ray tube will move around you and take detailed pictures of the inside of your body. The radiologist, a doctor who specializes in reading these images, will look at the images and write up a report on what they see.

## What is contrast?

You might be given *contrast* (dye) through an *intravenous* (IV) tube in your vein, *orally* (by mouth), or as an *enema* (injected into the rectum). The contrast moves through your blood vessels and organs and makes these tissues easier for your doctor to see in images.

If you have a history of known allergies to iodine contrast dye, let the provider know **before** your CT exam. They will decide if premedication is needed before you are given contrast.



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

## How should I prepare?

- Keep taking your prescribed medications as usual.
- Tell your provider if you are pregnant.
- If you don't have limits on how much you can drink, drink plenty of nonalcoholic fluids.
- **Important:** If you are having anesthesia or sedation on the day of your CT exam, please follow the instructions you received for not eating, drinking, or taking medications after midnight.

## On the day of your scan

- It is OK to eat a light meal (low-fat, non-fried) before your scan.
- If you don't have limits on how much you can drink, drink plenty of nonalcoholic fluids.
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.
- We recommend that you do not wear jewelry.

## Before the scan begins

- If there is **any** chance you might be pregnant, tell the CT technologist **before** the scan begins.
- If you are allergic to *iodinated contrast* (dye), let the technologist know **right away**.

Before your scan, we will ask you to remove:

- Clothing that might affect the images. This might include clothing with zippers, metal snaps, or bras with underwire.
- Hairpins, jewelry, glasses, hearing aids, and removable dental work if they are in the area being scanned.
- Insulin pump or a continuous glucose monitor (CGM), if it can be safely moved or removed during the scan.

For more information about imaging with insulin pumps or CGM devices, scan the QR code or visit: [healthonline.washington.edu/node/13072](https://healthonline.washington.edu/node/13072)



## If You Will Have Contrast

We will ask you to fill out a screening form either online or before your CT exam to determine if it is safe for you to be given contrast for your exam. Please tell the CT technologist if you've ever had an allergic reaction to contrast.

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

CT scans use X-rays. Because of this, you cannot 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 and set up for your exam.
- If you are having IV contrast, we will give you an injection of IV contrast.
- Some people might have a reaction to the contrast after it's given. Please let the technologist know **right away** if you have **any** signs of an allergic reaction such as:
  - Itching
  - Throat tightening
  - Trouble breathing
- The technologist will then leave the room while the images are being taken.
- You will be asked to hold still while images are being taken. The table will move in and out of the scanner as images are being taken. The technologist can always see, hear, and speak with you through an intercom, if needed.
- A CT scan usually takes 5 to 30 minutes, depending on the exam. When the scan is over, we might ask you to wait in an observation area for 30 minutes to make sure you don't need any follow-up care from the contrast.

## What will I feel during the scan?

If you are given:

- **IV contrast:** You might feel warm or flushed when the contrast is injected. You might also have a metallic taste in your mouth. These reactions are normal. They should get better in 1 to 2 minutes after the contrast has been injected.
- **Oral contrast:** You might find the taste mildly unpleasant.

## What should I do after the scan?

If you were given IV contrast for your exam and you don't have limits on how much you can drink, drink plenty of fluids to help the contrast leave your body through your urine (pee).

## Could I have a delayed allergic reaction to the contrast?

A small number of people have a *delayed reaction* to contrast. This means they get symptoms hours or possibly days after they receive contrast. Most times, these delayed reactions include rashes or itchy skin. If you have a delayed reaction to contrast, you may need treatment with skin lotions, steroids, and antihistamines. Please call your primary care provider.

## Who reads the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist will look at your images and write a report. This report will be sent to the provider who ordered the exam and might also be uploaded to your MyChart.

If you need copies of your images, send a MyChart message to request them. You can also contact Radiology Records at 206-598-6206. For same-day disc requests, please visit the Radiology front desk and complete the request form. Otherwise, Radiology Records will mail a CD to your registered address.

If you have questions about your results or need more information, please contact your care team.

### 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