

Computed Tomography (CT)

What You Need to Know and Do

Computed tomography (CT) is a test that combines X-rays and computer scans. It creates detailed images (pictures) of bone and soft tissues such as organs and blood vessels.

It is often necessary to use a special dye (contrast) to make a part of your body show up more clearly on the X-ray. If you need the dye, you may get it as something to drink and/or through an IV (intravenous) line. If you drink the contrast dye, it must be consumed about an hour prior to the CT scan.

What should I do before my appointment?

Unless you have congestive heart failure or are on dialysis, most patients need to drink 64 ounces (eight 8-ounce glasses) of water spread out over 12 hours before their scan. This is to keep you hydrated. You do not need a full bladder for the test and you may use the restroom.

All jewelry and other metallic objects must be removed from the area being scanned. This includes metal that is often part of clothing such as snaps, belts, and underwire bras.

You should wear comfortable clothing.

Be sure to tell the doctor, nurse, or technologist if you:

- have severe allergies or reactions to either medicine or food
- previous allergies to contrast dye. If so, you may be prescribed medicine by your doctor that will be taken 12 hours, and again 2 hours, before your exam time.
- are or think you may be pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding.

If you are breastfeeding, a small percentage of contrast dye will leak into the breast milk. We believe that it is safe for the mother and infant to continue breastfeeding after receiving contrast dye.

If you are concerned, you may wish to use a breast pump to obtain milk beforehand to feed your child during the 24 hour period following the exam.

If you decide not to breastfeed following the exam, you should express and discard breast milk from both breasts for 24 hours following the exam.

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When should I arrive for my appointment?

You will need to arrive at least 60 minutes before your appointment time to check in and complete paperwork.

If lab work was necessary and done in the clinic the same day as your CT exam, there may be a 1-3 hour delay waiting on lab results.

If you have renal insufficiency (poor function of your kidneys), this may cause your visit to be longer.

What happens during my CT scan?

A nurse or technologist may put in an IV (intravenous) line. This is how you will get the contrast dye. If you have a port, bring your documentation card and let the staff know. In most cases, it can be used to give you the contrast dye. The IV will be removed after the test is complete.

You will lie on a special table. The table will move you through the center of the doughnut-shaped CT scanner.

As you are moved through the scanner, you will need to stay as still as possible. You may be asked to hold your breath for a few seconds as each scan is made.

Most scans take 15-20 minutes.

What happens after my procedure?

You can go back to your normal activities and diet right away.

If you were given the dye, and you did not drink the 64 ounces of water before your CT scan, you should drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water over a 12-hour period after the exam unless you have congestive heart failure or are on dialysis.