

About Your Nuclear Medicine Scan

What You Need to Know and Do

A nuclear medicine scan is an imaging test that uses a special camera. The camera forms images of your organs (such as heart, lungs, liver, gallbladder), or your bones.

It is known as a “nuclear medicine” scan because it uses a small amount of radioactive material to diagnose medical problems. The radioactive material is safe.

Nuclear scans can help doctors diagnose many conditions, like cancers, injuries, and infections. They can also show how well your organs are working.

What should I do before my nuclear medicine scan?

Let your doctor know of any medicines you are taking, including vitamins, herbs, and over-the-counter medicines. Some of them may need to be stopped in the days before the test.

You should let your technologist know if you:

- are pregnant or breastfeeding
- have ever had a nuclear medicine scan
- have had a recent barium study, such as a barium enema, or X-ray
- have any fractures or artificial joints
- have any allergies.

How long will my bone scan last?

It could take a few hours. While you wait, it would be good to have something to do (such as reading a book you brought with you).

What will happen when I arrive for my nuclear medicine scan?

- You will be given a tracer (small amount of radioactive material). You may swallow or inhale the tracer, or it may be injected into your body.
- Your scan may be done right away, or a few hours after you arrive.
- There is a chance it could take days for enough tracer to reach the part of your body being studied. If that happens, you will have to return to the clinic again. You may have to return only once, but it could be as many as 4 more visits.
- During the scan, you will lie on a narrow imaging table.
- A large camera is placed close to your body. It will take pictures of your organs or bones.
- You should stay as still as you can while the camera takes the pictures. That way the best pictures can be taken.
- The table or camera may be adjusted to take more pictures.

What should I do after my exam?

- Drink plenty of water to help clear the tracer material from your body.
- You will come back for a follow-up visit. The doctor will discuss your test results during this visit. Or the doctor may discuss the test results with you over the phone.