

CT scan

This fact sheet tells you what a computed tomography (CT) scan is, and what is involved. Please read this sheet before having your CT scan. If you have any questions, ask your doctor.

What is a CT scan?

A CT scan is a painless test that uses X-rays and a special X-ray machine to take cross-sectional images, showing 'slices' of the part of the body that your doctor is interested in.

The CT scanner looks like a large ring or doughnut with a narrow table in the middle for you to lie on.

What is involved?

You will be given instructions on how to prepare for your CT scan.

Before the test, you should tell your doctor and the imaging staff if you have allergies, are pregnant or think you might be pregnant.

For the scan, you should remain as still as possible. Most people have a little difficulty with this test. You may need to have contrast injected into a vein in your arm to highlight the area being studied (see *Iodinated contrast* fact sheet).

The whole test usually takes 10 to 20 minutes.

What happens after the test?

A radiologist (a specialist doctor) assesses the images and sends the results to your referring doctor. You should not have any issues after your test.

Are there any risks?

The dose of radiation used in a CT scan is generally small and rarely produces harmful effects. If you have many CT scans, there is a slight increase in the lifetime risk of cancer. The small potential risk is balanced against the benefits of picking up serious injury or disease. The radiation dose will be kept as low as possible, especially if you are pregnant or very young.

If you had the contrast, there is also some risk related to this (see *Iodinated contrast* fact sheet).

For more information

InsideRadiology by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists: www.insideradiology.com.au

RadiologyInfo by the American College of Radiology and Radiological Society of North America: www.radiologyinfo.org

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency: www.arpansa.gov.au

The Alliance for Radiation Safety in Pediatric Imaging: www.imagegently.org

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