

CT Scan (Computed Tomography)

Introduction

A CT (Computed Tomography) 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 has asked to be investigated.

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

A radiographer will perform the examination.

Purpose

Your doctor may refer you for a CT if they feel that this test would be the most useful to identify the site and cause of your symptoms.

Preparation

Depending on the type of examination you are having, you may need some preparation. For some scans you will be asked to change into a gown.

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

You may need to complete a consent form before the scan, in regards to your medical history and allergies.

It is important that you tell your own doctor and staff at the radiology facility where you are having the CT if there is any chance you might be pregnant. This is important information, as it will make a difference in the way the CT is carried out or a different test altogether might be required. Your safety and that of your unborn child is the number one priority.

You may also be asked to remove your hairclips, earrings, pins, chains or other items of jewellery before the examination, as these can sometimes interfere with the CT scan.

For the scan, you should remain as still as possible. You may need to have contrast

injected into a vein in your arm to highlight the area being studied (see Iodinated contrast consumer information sheet). The whole test usually takes 10 to 20 minutes.

Results

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. You need to discuss the results with your treating doctor.

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 consumer information sheet).

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

ACI Radiology Network:
www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au