

If you have any questions or concerns about the CT scan, please ask the Radiology staff.

Computerized Tomography (CT) Scan

A computed tomography (CT) scan is a special way of looking inside your body. The images produced are cross-sectional planes taken from a part of your body, much like slices taken out of a loaf of bread. The length of the exam will depend upon the area to be scanned and specific information needed by your doctors. The CT scan is done in the Radiology (X-ray) department.

Please tell your doctor or the X-ray staff if you:

- Are pregnant, might be pregnant, are trying to get pregnant.
- Are allergic to contrast dye.
- Are on dialysis or have known kidney disease.
- Are diabetic.
- Have had a problem with this exam (or other contrast exams) in the past.

Preparation for the Test

If you have a contrast dye allergy or are taking metformin (Glucophage®, Glucophage XR®, Glucovance®), you will be given special medication instructions. It is important that you follow these instructions carefully.

For dialysis patients, the CT scan may need to be scheduled on the same day as your dialysis treatment.

Other preparations for the CT scan will vary depending on the area of the body to be examined. Your doctor will inform you of any needed preparations. These may include:

- Pregnancy testing and advice for withholding breastfeeding
- Diet restrictions
- Proper fluid intake
- Laxatives or bowel preparations

Patients will need to change into a hospital gown for this exam. Outpatients will be shown to a dressing area for changing. You will need to remove any loose or hanging jewelry, such as necklaces. It is not usually necessary to remove rings or watches, but you may choose to do so for comfort.

For certain tests, you may be asked to drink a liquid contrast agent. This oral contrast agent outlines the stomach and bowel on the pictures and will make certain parts of your body appear bright on the pictures. This step is important in obtaining accurate results. If you have any stomach upset or diarrhea, please tell the CT staff.

Another contrast agent, a dye, may be needed during the scan. This is injected through an IV (into the vein) line. This line may be started before the CT scan begins. When we start the IV, we draw a small amount of blood to check your kidney function.

During the Test

Before the test begins, the CT staff will explain the test and the equipment used. You will be asked to lie on a table connected to the CT scan machine. The technologist (tech) will line up the part of your body to be examined. The table will then move so that you are in the center of the machine. The tech will keep in contact with you throughout the exam by intercom.

As the exam begins, it is very important that you lie still and follow the instructions of the tech and doctor. The tech may ask you to hold your breath several times during the test.

If needed, a doctor, nurse, or tech will inject the IV contrast. As it is injected, you may feel warm and flushed or feel the urge to urinate. You may also note a metallic taste in your mouth. These are normal effects, although most people will feel nothing at all. Please tell the staff right away if you note any of the following:

- Shortness of breath
- Hives
- Itching

After the Test

You may resume your normal activities and diet after the test. If you received a contrast agent during the test, it is suggested that you drink an additional 1 or 2 glasses of water. The contrast agent will not discolor your urine. Although it is rare to have any delayed allergic reactions, contact the CT department or your doctor if any rash or swelling occurs.

If you received an oral preparation, you may notice a change in the color and frequency of your bowel movements. If any change lasts more than 2 to 3 days, please contact your doctor.

If you have any questions or concerns about this test, please ask your doctor, nurse or Radiology staff.

Radiation Safety

CT scans use radiation to produce images needed for diagnosis and treatment. There are risks to radiation exposure. It is important to talk with your doctor before having the test to learn about:

- Its risks and benefits.
- The reason for the test.

We are committed to your safety. This means that your scan will be done with the least amount of radiation without reducing the quality of the exam.

The Northwestern Medicine CT department is proud to be accredited by the American College of Radiology (ACR). Earning this designation ensures that:

- We have undergone a thorough review process.
- Our staff is well qualified, through education and certification to perform and interpret your test results.
- Our equipment is suitable for the test or treatment provided.
- We meet or exceed national quality and safety guidelines.

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363, the Northwestern Lake Forest Patient Relations manager at 847.535.8282 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Department of Radiology