

*If you have  
any questions,  
please ask your  
physician, nurse  
or CT scan tech.*

## Computed Tomography Scan

A computed tomography (CT) scan is a special way of looking inside your body using X-ray images and computer processing. The images produced are cross-sectional images taken from different angles around your body, much like slices taken out of a loaf of bread. The length of the test will depend upon the area to be scanned and specific information needed by your physicians. The CT scan is done in the Department of Radiology.

Please tell your physician, nurse or CT technician (tech) if you:

- Are pregnant, might be pregnant or are trying to get pregnant
- Are allergic to contrast dye
- Have kidney disease or are being treated with dialysis
- Have had a barium study within the last 5 days
- Have had a problem with this test (or other contrast tests) in the past

### Preparation for the test

If you are allergic to contrast dye, you will be given special medication instructions. It is important that you follow these instructions carefully.

Other preparations for the CT scan will vary depending on the area of your body that will be examined. Your physician will tell you what you need to do to prepare. This may include:

- Pregnancy testing
- Diet restrictions
- Proper fluid intake
- Laxatives or bowel preparations

You will be asked to wear a hospital gown for this test. There are dressing areas and lockers in the Radiology Department where you can change into a gown if you are coming to the hospital from home. You will need to remove any loose or hanging jewelry, such as necklaces and some earrings. It is not usually necessary to remove rings or watches, but you may choose to do so for comfort.

For CT scans of some areas of your body, you may be asked to drink a CT contrast liquid. This contrast liquid will outline your stomach and bowel on the images and will make certain parts of your body appear bright on the images. This step is important for accurate results. If you have any stomach upset or diarrhea, please tell the CT scan tech.

Sometimes a contrast dye that is injected into your vein may be needed during the scan. If so, the IV (intravenous, or into the vein) line will be placed in your hand or arm before the CT scan begins. When the IV line is started, a small amount of blood may be taken to check your kidney function, if needed.

## **During the test**

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

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

If needed, a physician, nurse or tech will inject the contrast dye. As it is injected, you may feel warm and flushed or feel the urge to urinate. You may also notice a metallic taste in your mouth. These are normal effects of the contrast dye, although most people will notice nothing at all. Please tell the CT scan tech right away if you have any of these symptoms:

- 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 (liquid or dye) during the test, drink an extra 1 or 2 glasses of water after the test to help flush the contrast agent from your system. The contrast agent will not discolor your urine. Although it is rare to have any delayed allergic reactions, contact your physician if you get a rash or notice any swelling.

If you drank the contrast liquid, you may notice a change in the color and frequency of your bowel movements. If any changes last more than 2 to 3 days, please contact your physician.

If you have any questions or concerns about this test, please ask your physician, nurse or CT scan tech.

## **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 physician before having the test to learn about:

- Risks and benefits of the test
- Why you need the test

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

The Northwestern Medicine CT Department is proud to be accredited by the American College of Radiology. This accreditation establishes 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.