

Having a CT scan

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having a CT scan. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions, please speak **to the doctor, nurse or radiographer caring for you.**

What is a CT scan?

CT stands for computerised tomography. A CT scan takes a series of images of your body using x-rays. These show cross-sections or slices of your body. They are put together by a computer and can be viewed on a screen. The scan shows a very detailed image of the inside of your body.

What happens during a CT scan?

The scanning machine is like a large doughnut. You will need to lie on a motorised bed. This slides slowly into the centre of the ring until the part of the body to be scanned is within the ring. The x-ray machine within the ring rotates around your body. As it rotates, the x-ray machine sends thin beams of x-rays through your body, which are detected by the x-ray detectors. Unlike some other scanning machines, the CT scanner is not enclosed. However, you will need to lie very still while each picture is taken to avoid blurring the images and you may be asked to hold your breath for a moment. Straps and pillows may be used to help maintain the correct position and to keep you still during the examination. When you are positioned, the radiographers will leave the room but you will be able to talk to them through an intercom and they will be watching you through the glass window. The images are recorded and the radiographer (member of the radiology team trained to carry out scans) will check them briefly to ensure that they are diagnostic (of good enough quality to be used to make a diagnosis).

Scans of certain areas of your body may require an injection of contrast dye. If you need an injection of contrast, one of the CT staff will give you this using a small needle inserted into a vein in your arm or the back of your hand. The injection may give you a metallic taste in your mouth and a 'hot flush'. Some people feel as though they want to pass water (wet themselves) – don't worry, you won't, it just gives you that feeling. All of these sensations pass in a couple of minutes.

When the scan is finished, the radiographer will come and help you off the table and you will be able to leave the scanning room. Whilst the radiographer can reassure you that the appropriate images have been

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obtained, they will usually not be able to give you any idea of the results at that time.

How long will it take?

This depends on which part of your body is being scanned but it typically takes between 10 and 20 minutes. Including the preparation that may be needed, you should plan to be in the CT Department for up to 1 hour. Your appointment letter will give you more details. We will try to keep to your appointment time but occasionally we have to scan patients urgently at short notice. This means that your appointment could be delayed. We will let you know if this is the case.

Why should I have a CT scan?

A CT scan can help your doctor to find the cause of your problem and the best treatment options for you.

Are there any alternatives? Your doctor feels that a CT scan is the best option for you. A standard x-ray will not provide the same level of detail.

How can I prepare for the scan? Depending on the type of scan you are being referred for you may need to follow certain instructions prior to arriving within the department. These may include a period of fasting, collecting a drink to have the night before, or a preparation for your bowel that needs to be started 2 days in advance of your scan. It is important that these are followed otherwise your scan may be delayed until another day. You will be advised of any preparations at the time of booking, or on your appointment letter.

If you are taking any medicines, please continue to take these as usual unless you have been told otherwise by your doctor. If you are taking medicines for diabetes or asthma, then these may need to be altered around the time of the procedure. Call the CT Department on 01 2115148, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, for advice as soon as you get your appointment letter.

All women between the ages 12-55 will need to know the date of their last menstrual period as scans will be performed within 10 days of the first day. If you are outside of this timeframe on the day of your scan, it may not be performed. Please call the department on 01-211 5020 or 01-2115253 to reschedule to avoid this happening. If you need to bring your children with you, please bring along an adult who can supervise them while your scan is being done. We are unable to offer childcare facilities.

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What do I need to wear?

Comfortable clothing is recommended. Metal fastenings like zips, poppers and hooks and eyes will show up on the scan, so we may ask you to change into a hospital gown.

If we are scanning your head, then head coverings, hairbands, grips and earrings will also need to be removed. For certain scans you may need to remove any metallic dentures or hearing aids. Dental fillings will not affect the scan.

Will I feel any pain?

You should not feel any pain during the scan itself. The most difficult part is keeping still. Try to relax as much as possible. If you find it uncomfortable to lie still then please tell the radiographer.

What are the risks?

As with x-rays, CT scans use radiation. The level of radiation used is very small and the benefits of the scan are thought to outweigh any risks.

The contrast dye that is sometimes used contains iodine which some people are allergic to. We will check whether you have had any allergies in the past before your scan. Occasionally if you are having a contrast enhanced CT, there is a small risk that the injection of contrast can leak out under the skin instead of in the vein. If this does happen then further advice will be given to by the Radiographer and Radiologist at the time of the CT.

If you are, or think you could be, pregnant or have had an allergic reaction to x-ray contrast in the past, then you must tell your doctor. Alternatively, contact CT reception at 01 -211 5020 or 01-2115253, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.

Giving my consent (permission)

We want to involve you in decisions about you care and treatment. We will ask you to read and sign the contrast consent form if your scan requires the contrast dye injection. You will be asked to sign the form if you decide to go ahead, as this states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves. NB: if you do not consent to the injection, the scan may still go ahead, but the information provided may not be as good as with the injection and further tests may be needed for your treatment.

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What happens after the scan?

In most cases, as soon as the scan is finished you can go home, or back to your ward if you are staying in hospital. If you have had a contrast dye injection, we may ask you to wait for 20 minutes before you leave the department. This is to ensure that you are all right and there is no sign of any allergic reaction to the contrast dye you had been given. You can eat and drink as normal and resume your usual activities straight after the scan.

When will I get the results?

The results will not be given to you immediately. Your CT scan will be studied by a radiologist and the results will be sent to the doctor who referred you for the scan. They will discuss the results with you and any treatment you may need. If you are an out-patient please allow 7-14 days for the results to be sent to your referring doctor. If you are staying in hospital the results will be given to the doctors looking after you on the ward. Unfortunately it will not be possible for you to receive the results at the time of your scan.

If you have not heard from your doctor or health care professional after 14 days, please contact them directly.

***Please cancel your appointment by phone 01-211 5020/
01-2115253 (direct line) or by email radiology.stch@hse.ie
If you are unable to come***