# CT Scan: What to Expect Before, During and After Your Appointment

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**A simple guide to CT preparation, breath-holding, contrast, radiation and receiving your results.**

## What is a CT scan?

Computed tomography (CT) uses X-rays and computer processing to create detailed cross-sectional images of the body. The images can be viewed in different planes and reconstructed in three dimensions.

CT is particularly useful for the lungs, bones, calcium, blood vessels, trauma and many chest, abdominal and pelvic conditions. The exact protocol depends on the clinical question written on your referral.

## Before your appointment

Your referral and relevant history should be available before the appointment so the CT team can choose the correct body coverage, radiation settings and contrast protocol.

- Tell the clinic if you are pregnant or may be pregnant.
- Advise the clinic about kidney disease, diabetes, thyroid disease, previous contrast reactions and severe allergies.
- Provide a current medication list, including metformin and blood-thinning medication.
- Follow the specific fasting, hydration or medication instructions supplied for your scan.
- Bring or arrange access to previous imaging when comparison may be important.

## During the scan

You will lie on a table that moves through the wide, ring-shaped CT scanner. The scanner is not a long tunnel. The image acquisition is usually quick, although positioning, preparation and contrast may make the overall appointment longer.

You may be asked to raise your arms, keep still or hold your breath for a few seconds. These instructions reduce motion and improve image quality.

## Will I need contrast?

Not every CT scan requires contrast. Iodine-based contrast may be injected through a small cannula to make blood vessels, organs, inflammation or tumours easier to assess. Some examinations also use contrast by mouth.

## After the scan and results

Most patients can return to normal activity immediately. If contrast was used, follow the hydration and observation instructions provided by the clinic.

A radiologist reviews the images and sends a report to the referring clinician. CT may provide the answer directly, but pathology is variable and some findings require MRI, ultrasound, PET/CT, endoscopy, laboratory testing or biopsy for a confident diagnosis.

Related Patient Guides

- PG2002 – What Is Spectral CT? A Simple Patient Guide
- PG2003 – Spectral CT in Cancer Imaging: What Patients Should Know
- PG2004 – CT Contrast: Iodine Contrast Explained
- PG2005 – Radiation Dose in CT: Understanding Risk, Benefit and Context
- PG2006 – Low-Dose CT Lung Screening: Preparation, Results and Follow-Up
- PG2007 – Coronary Artery Calcium Score: What the Test Can and Cannot Show
- PG2008 – CT Coronary Angiography: How to Prepare and What to Expect
- PG2009 – CT Angiography: Brain, Neck, Aorta and Peripheral Arteries
- PG2010 – Dental and Cone Beam CT: What to Expect

We have more detailed information on many interesting regenerative and radiological topics on our Insights page

## Frequently Asked Questions

For other FAQs please visit our FAQs page

**Is a CT scan painful?**

The scan itself is painless. A cannula or lying in one position may cause brief discomfort.

**How long does a CT scan take?**

The image acquisition may take seconds to several minutes. The full appointment is longer when preparation, contrast or heart-rate control is required.

**Can I have CT with a pacemaker or joint replacement?**

Usually yes. Metal and electronic implants do not create the same safety restrictions as MRI, although they can sometimes cause image artefact.

> **Important:** The preparation instructions supplied for your specific booking take priority over this general guide.

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PATIENT GUIDE • PG-2001 [Patient information: ***A simple guide to CT preparation, breath-holding, contrast, radiation and receiving your results.***]

For further reading on CT Scans please see below:

- Appendicitis CT Scan
- Chest CT Scan
- CT Scan for Back Pain
- Knee CT Scan
- Pulmonary Fibrosis
- Asbestosis CT Scan
- CT Abdomen Scan
- Heart CT Scan
- Lung CT Scan
- Sinus CT Scan
- Brain CT Scan
- CT Scan Calcium Score
- Kidney CT Scan
- Neck CT Scan

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