



Royal Cornwall Hospitals
NHS Trust

CT Scan



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What is a CT scan?

CT stands for Computed Tomography and is a special type of scan that uses X-rays. The information from the scan is recorded in a series of slice pictures. These pictures give more detailed information than a normal X-ray.

What are the benefits of a CT scan?

A CT scan allows us to gain very detailed pictures of the inside of your body. The pictures help us to diagnose or assess any health problems, and to give you the best possible treatment.

Are there any alternatives?

There are several other types of imaging such as MRI scans, ultrasound and X-rays. Your doctor has decided that a CT scan is the best test for your current circumstances.

Are there any risks?

CT scanners are designed to keep the radiation dose to you as low as possible. If your doctor has asked for a scan, he or she will have decided that the benefit of having the scan, and the information that it gives, is greater than the risk of the small radiation dose.

For many CT examinations (but not all) you will be given an injection of an X-ray dye (contrast agent). Depending on the area we are imaging, we need to give contrast agent as it makes the images clearer. As with any injection there is a small chance of an allergic reaction. If this happens it is usually mild and very rarely serious. However, with certain types of kidney problem, the contrast may occasionally cause the kidney function to deteriorate.

If your doctor thinks you may be at risk of this happening, you will be offered fluid via a drip before the scan to help prevent it.

Remember, contrast only rarely causes a problem. Without contrast certain types of scan cannot be performed. Your doctor has decided that the benefits significantly outweigh the risks described here.

Please note if we need to give you a contrast injection for your CT scan, we will require an up to date blood test which shows us your kidney function. If you have not had a recent up to date blood test we will ask you to arrange one with your GP before having your CT scan. Please be aware that without this you may not be able to have your scan.

What happens if I don't have this scan?

If you don't have this scan, your doctor will have less information to diagnose and/or assess your health problems. This will make it harder for us to give you the best treatment for your condition.

How do I prepare for my scan?

Unless you are instructed on your appointment letter, there is no special preparation for this scan. You can eat and drink normally. Please continue all medication as normal unless you have been instructed to stop any in your appointment letter, or by your doctor.

If possible, wear loose clothing with no metal buttons, fastenings or zips. If you don't have suitable clothing, please don't worry.

What if I am diabetic?

If you are taking a medication called Metformin, please let us know when you come for your scan.

What happens during the scan?

A radiographer or imaging assistant will escort you into the preparation or scan room, and explain what will happen during your scan. This is an ideal time for you to ask any questions you may have. If required, we may get you changed into a hospital gown. You will be asked to lie flat on the scanning table, and you will be positioned to go into the scanner head or feet first depending on the area we are scanning.

The scanner looks like a large doughnut. You will not be shut in, and you will not have to lie in a tunnel. The scan itself will take around 10 minutes. You may be asked to hold your breath at times during the scan, but this should be for no more than 15 seconds.

As mentioned, you may be given an injection of X-ray dye as part of the scan. If you need this, you will need to have a cannula (small plastic tube) inserted into a vein in your arm or hand. This allows your blood vessels to be seen more clearly. You may get a warm feeling and an odd taste in your mouth for a few moments, but this is normal and will quickly wear off. You will be able to drive home following the injection.

If you know that you have an allergy to X-ray dye, please telephone the CT department before your appointment.

Please note that as we are part of a busy hospital, occasionally there may be unavoidable delays due to emergency scans. We will try to keep any delays to a minimum and keep you informed.

Will I have any pain or discomfort?

The test is not painful, you may just feel a warm flush if we give you the contrast injection.

What happens afterwards?

If you have had an injection of X-ray dye you will be asked to wait in the department for 15 minutes after your examination. After this time you will be allowed to leave the department.

If you did not have an injection, you may leave the department immediately.

When will I get my results?

A radiologist will look at your scan images and write a report, which will be sent to the person who referred you for the scan. You should receive an appointment to see your referring doctor again, if you do not already have one.

What if I can't attend my appointment?

If you are unable to attend your appointment, please tell us as soon as possible so we can arrange another appointment, if required.

We perform CT scans at the Royal Cornwall Hospital, Truro, West Cornwall Hospital, Penzance and the Community Diagnostic Centre at Bodmin. Please check your letter carefully to ensure you attend the correct hospital.

About your consent

Before we carry out any examination or treatment we will need your permission - this is known as consent. Before the examination starts we will explain what is involved and what we hope to gain from it. We will then ask for your consent to continue. For some procedures it may be necessary to sign a consent form, if this is the case we will discuss it with you.

If you change your mind about having the examination or treatment, you can withdraw your consent at any time no matter how you gave it. Everything discussed between you and the member of staff will remain confidential. If you would like further information about consent or confidentiality, please read our information leaflet outlining consent.

Contact us

If you have any questions about your scan, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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Directorate of Clinical Imaging
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Truro
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If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

