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# What Is a Gallium Scan?

A gallium scan is a nuclear medicine scan. It's a type of imaging test. It's done to look for inflammation, infection, or cancer in your body. Nuclear medicine uses small amounts of radioactive substance.

## How does a gallium scan work?

A gallium scan uses gallium citrate. This is a medicine that has a very small amount of radioactive gallium. One or 2 days before your scan, your healthcare provider injects gallium citrate into a vein in your arm. The gallium then travels all over your body. It builds up in any cells that are growing quickly, such as cancer cells. It also sticks to cells and proteins that are inflamed.

A special camera can see where the gallium has built up in your body. It can then form an image to show where the cells of your body are growing the fastest. These images can help your healthcare provider see if there is cancer, infection, or inflammation in your body.

## Why might I need a gallium scan?

Someone with cancer of the lymph system (lymphoma) may need a gallium scan. This can help show how much the disease has spread. The scans can also show how well chemotherapy, or another treatment, is working.

Gallium scans are used less often now than other imaging methods. This type of scan doesn't find all forms of cancer. But it can still be helpful in tracking some types. You also may need a gallium scan to diagnose or track health conditions, such as:

- A fever with no known cause
- Certain lung infections
- Lung damage from certain medicines

## How is a gallium scan done?

You will get an injection of gallium citrate hours or days before your scan. You will then return at an exact time for your scan. It may be several hours to a few days later. You will lie on your back in the scanning machine. An overhead camera will move above you. It will take pictures over the length of your body. The scan is painless. The scan may last about an hour.

## What are the risks of a gallium scan?

All procedures have some risks. The risks of this procedure include:

- Allergic reaction, which may cause trouble breathing in rare cases
- Rash
- Nausea

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Your risks may vary depending on your age and overall health. Talk with your healthcare provider about which risks apply to you. Pregnant women should not have the scan if possible. It may not be safe for the growing baby.

The scan uses a small amount of radiation. Large amounts of radiation can increase your risk for cancer. But the amount in a gallium scan is very small. It's less than the amount in many types of X-rays. Your body clears the gallium from your system over several days. The gallium is not a danger to anyone around you. You don't need to take any special care to prevent contact with others.