

Learning About Your Child's CT Scan

A computed tomography--or CT--scan uses X-rays to make detailed pictures of organs and other structures in your child's body.

The test is used to check for lots of different health problems, to help with a surgery or procedure, or to check how well a procedure worked.

The test is done inside a large doughnut-shaped machine called a CT scanner.

It uses a small dose of radiation. But it's safe, because the amount is very small.

Before the test, let your doctor know if your child has any health problems or allergies.

Here's how a CT scan is done. Your child will put on a hospital gown or scrubs and take off any jewelry.

To help the doctor see organs or blood vessels more clearly, your child may get a dye, called contrast material, through an I.V. tube in the arm.

Or your child may need to drink the dye. It can make some children have a headache or feel flushed or sick to their stomach.

Your child will need to hold still during the test. So the doctor may give medicines to help your child relax and feel sleepy.

You can ask the doctor if it's okay to be in the room with your child.

Your child will lie down on a table that slides into the opening of the CT scanner, and the scanner will make the images. The test usually lasts a few minutes.

Depending on the reason for the CT scan, your child may go home right after the test. Children who get medicines to help them relax or lie still may need to wait an hour or two before going home, so the medicines can wear off.

If a dye was used for the test, make sure your child drinks plenty of fluids to help flush out the dye, unless your doctor says not to. Getting a CT scan might seem scary at first, especially for kids.

But it's safe and doesn't hurt--it might help to remind kids of that.

And hospital staff will be there the whole time to make sure your child is okay.