

Learning About Your CT Scan

A computed tomography—or CT—scan uses X-rays to make detailed pictures of organs and other structures in your 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 you have any health problems or allergies.

Here's how a CT scan is done.

You'll put on a hospital gown or scrubs and take off any jewelry.

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

Or you may need to drink the dye.

Some people get a headache or feel flushed or sick to their stomach.

You'll need to hold still during the test.

So the doctor may give medicines to help you relax and feel sleepy.

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You'll 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, you may go home right after the test.

If you had medicines to help you relax or lie still, you may need to wait an hour or two before going home, so the medicines can wear off.

Or you may need an adult friend or family member who will drive you home.

If a dye was used for the test, make sure you drink plenty of fluids to help flush out the dye, unless your doctor says not to.

Getting a CT scan might seem scary at first, but it's safe and doesn't hurt—it might help to remember that.

And hospital staff will be there the whole time to make sure you're safe and as comfortable as possible.