

Information About Your Cardiac CT Scan

Please arrive in the department 20 minutes before your appointment time

Introduction

Your doctor has referred you for a CT scan.

This page contains information for patients, parents and carers about having a CT scan, how to prepare and what happens during your scan.

What is a CT scan?

A CT (computed Tomography) scan is a type of examination where X-rays are used in combination with computer technology to create a detailed 3D image of the body.

The scanner is a slim, doughnut-shaped machine, with a bed which moves slowly through the hole in the middle, whilst you are being scanned.

What is Cardiac CT?

Cardiac CT is a scan which specifically looks at the heart and the blood vessels which supply it. This is a non-invasive test.

How to prepare for your scan

Please read all the information sent to you regarding your appointment.

Please do not consume food or drink which contains caffeine (tea, coffee, chocolate, energy drinks or pill) for 24 hours prior to your CT scan. Caffeine can raise the heart rate and therefore affect the image quality of the CT scan.

Please do not take Viagra for 48 hours prior to your CT scan as this can interact with medication used during your scan.

If you have been prescribed medication for this test, ensure you take this as prescribed as not doing so could lead to your test being postponed or cancelled.

Please continue to take any medication you are on as normal.

Giving Your Consent

We want to involve you in all decisions about your care and treatment.

The radiographer will check your details with you; they will also confirm which part of your body you are expecting to have scanned and if you are happy for the scan to go ahead. This is called verbal consent and confirms that you have agreed to the procedure and understand what it involves.

The doctor that refers you for the scan will explain the risks and benefits of the test. If you are unsure about any aspect of the scan please do not hesitate to speak to the doctor or the Radiographer carrying out the scan.

What happens during the scan?

On arrival at the CT department you may be asked to change into a hospital gown.

The radiographic support worker will take you into a room to complete a few checks prior to your CT scan. They will check your blood pressure, heart rate and your height and weight. They will then place a cannula (small needle) into your hand/arm.

The examination will be explained to you and you may ask any questions you have.

You will then be taken into the CT scanning room and asked to lie on the scanner table feet first.

During the scan you will be required to hold your breath for short periods (about 10 seconds). This is a small shallow breathe so that it is easier to hold for the scan. Please practice this at home.

The scan takes about 20 minutes.

You may be given an injection of a beta-blocker (Metoprolol) to slow your heart rate slightly. You will also be given a GTN tablet to place under your tongue, this dilates the blood vessels supplying your heart and gives a clearer images of your hearts vessels

Will I need an Injection?

You will be given an injection of contrast dye. The injection will be given via the cannula which was inserted into your arm or hand.

- What is the contrast dye?

The contrast dye is a colourless liquid called Omnipaque 300 (iodine-based). This is a routine part of CT examinations.

The contrast dye is used to highlight the blood vessels supplying your heart. The contrast dye is excreted by the body through the kidneys so you may be required to have a blood test prior to your CT appointment to check your kidney function. If needed details will be attached to your CT appointment letter.

Are there any side effects of the injection?

When the contrast dye is injected, you might feel a hot flush and get a metallic taste in your mouth. Some patients can experience a sensation of passing urine but they don't actually do it. These sensations are normal and pass within a few minutes.

It is rare to react to the contrast dye. The most common allergic reactions are nausea and vomiting, headache, sneezing, itching, flushing, mild skin rash or hives. These are usually soon after the injection. Please inform the radiographer if you experience any of these symptoms.

Sometimes the reaction can be serious (risk: 1 in 2,500) or even life threatening (risk: 1 in 25,000). Please let the radiographer know if you have had any reaction to x-ray dyes in the past.

If you experience any of these symptoms after you have left the department please contact your local A&E department.

The needle may cause you some discomfort when it is inserted, and you may experience bruising at the injection site.

After the CT scan?

As you have had an injection of contrast you will need to wait in the CT waiting room for 20 minutes post injection. Then you are free to go.

You may eat and drink normally following your scan.

You will not receive any results on the day. The images will be reviewed by a Cardiologist and Radiologist and a report sent to the doctor that referred you for the scan. An explanation of how to get your results will be given to you after the examination.

Special Information for persons of childbearing age (12 – 55 years)

If you have reason to believe you may be pregnant please contact the CT department on the number on your appointment letter before starting any preparation, and before attending your appointment. As the examination uses X-rays there is a risk to any unborn child, especially in early pregnancy.

Breastfeeding

Current guidelines state that it is safe to breastfeed following injection of contrast dye as so little is passed to the baby via the breastmilk; however we advise further discussion with the radiographer to make an informed decision.

Alternatively, if you prefer, you can express and discard breastmilk for 24 hours following the scan when the contrast will have been excreted.

Childcare

We are unable to offer childcare facilities and your children cannot go in the scan room with you. If you need to bring your children with you please bring along somebody who can look after them while you are being scanned.