

What you need to know about CT Scanning...

What is a CT Scan?

Computed Axial Tomography (CAT or CT) is a way to look inside your body. It produces cross-sectional images, much like slices of bread. By taking a series of these images, a CT scan creates a multi-dimensional view of your body. This greatly enhances our ability to diagnose your medical condition.

How does a CT Scan work?

The main feature of the CT scan equipment is a large “ring.” As the patient passes through the ring, the X-ray tube rotates around the patient and takes pictures or visual “slices.” These views are projected onto a computer screen. Once transferred to X-ray film, this becomes a permanent record of your examination.

May I take someone with me?

Certainly. Your friend or family member is welcome to stay in the waiting room.

How should I prepare for my exam?

You may take your prescription medicines on schedule — unless your physician has instructed you differently.

1. **Head CT** — Do not eat or drink fluids for 4 hours before your exam.
2. **Chest CT** — Do not eat or drink fluids for 4 hours before your exam.
3. **Abdominal and/or Pelvic CT** — You need to take a preparation, called E-Z Cat Dry, before your procedure. Follow the instructions provided with this contrast material. You will need to arrive a half-hour before your procedure is scheduled to begin. At that time, you will be given more contrast material to drink. The night before your exam, do not eat or drink anything after midnight.
4. **CT of Extremities, CT of Sinus, or CT for Kidney Stone** — No preparation is required.

What about my clothing?

You may be asked to undress, put on a hospital gown, pajama bottoms, and remove any jewelry or other items that may interfere with the imaging. While sweat suits or jogging clothes are recommended, a gown will be provided, if it is needed.

What will happen during the exam?

You will be taken to a room that contains the CT scanner. It is not necessary for this large machine to actually touch you in order to work. You will be asked to lie on a moveable table. You will be positioned so that the part of your body to be examined lies in the middle of the scanner’s ring. After leaving you in the room, the technologist will watch you through a glass window and keep in close contact with you via an intercom. As the scanning begins, the table will start to move, sliding you a short distance every few seconds. Each time a new picture is taken, the technologist may ask you to hold your breath so as not to blur the picture. The sound of gears and motors may be a little unnerving, but you should just try to relax.

How do we get high quality images?

A contrast solution or dye may be given by mouth, injection, or enema, to enhance the image. This agent contains iodine, which X-rays cannot penetrate. By injecting this agent into the body the radiologist can better visualize organs and structures that might otherwise not be seen. Scans are completed before and after the contrast solution is administered. The side effects from the solution are few or none. Your health history may affect the use of contrast materials.

Is it safe?

Yes, the procedure is safe. Millions of people have been examined using the CT scan. There are no significant side effects from having this exam. The ionizing radiation involved with the X-rays used in CT scans is minimal. Being scheduled for a CT scan does not necessarily mean that you are suffering from an illness. It simply means that the doctor wants to use the best technology available to find out what is causing your complaints. The technologist or radiologist will discuss with you the benefits and potential side effects that may be associated with this procedure. You should use this time to discuss any concerns you may have.

When will I learn the results?

The radiologist will read the results of your CT scan and send a report to your physician. Normally, your physician will inform you of the results of this test and any other necessary testing or treatment within 3 working days.

Whom should I call if I have any other questions?

Please feel free to call Northfield Hospital's Medical Imaging Department at (507) 646-1143.