

Tools to help you talk with your provider

What are CT Scans?

A computerized tomography (CT) scan, also sometimes referred to as a CAT scan, combines the use of x-ray and computer imaging to produce images of parts of the body¹. While CT scans are not perfect, they can detect several types of illnesses and injuries, such as tumors, infections, bone fractures, kidney stones and blocked arteries/veins.

Benefits of CT Scans:

- **CT Scans provide finer detail than conventional x-rays.** A CT scan can see certain things an x-ray cannot see, such as problems with organs and complex injuries such as hip fractures. It takes multiple images of your body from different angles to provide a roughly 3D picture of potential problems.
- **CT Scans can reduce the length of hospitalizations and need for exploratory surgeries.** Since CT scans have higher detail, they can see allow doctors to rapidly assess a patient's condition, in some cases to guide further treatment or follow-up².
- **CT Scans are very quick and painless.** A normal CT scan takes roughly 5-10 minutes, and does not require sitting still for extended periods of time, such as what is necessary for MRI or PET/CT scans. Additionally, the quality of the images enables radiologists to read the scans quickly, providing rapid closure on a potential condition.

Risks of CT Scans:

- **CT Scans emit radiation, which can be harmful.** Radiation is a byproduct of the improved image quality of CT scans. Increased exposure to radiation from CT scans can put an individual at heightened risk of developing cancer later in life.
- **CT Scans pose potential increased risks for pregnant women and children.** Radiation can affect an unborn child, so scans are not recommended in pregnant women. Additionally, babies that are nursing are at risk from contrast material, and children are highly sensitive to radiation³.
- **Overdetection of disease (false findings).** The high quality of CT scans can lead radiologists to find minor abnormalities that, had they not been seen, would never cause any health problems. Detecting these abnormalities can also lead to further testing, leading to greater radiation exposure. Think of these as birth marks on your organs.

What can I do to learn more about CT Scans?

Ask your doctor:

- **What are my options?**
 - How necessary is a CT scan for your particular condition?
 - Is it possible to get an MRI or Ultrasound instead?
 - Are there alternatives to receiving a scan?
- **If I need a CT scan, how much of a radiation dose will I receive?**
 - There is a range of radiation levels at which a radiologist can conduct a CT scan. Ask your radiologist to use a lower dose for your scan.
 - Be sure to ask your provider to inform you of the radiation dose used in your scan, so you can keep a record of the radiation dose received from all of your imaging tests.

¹ <http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/ct-scan/basics/definition/prc-20014610>

² <https://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info.cfm?pg=bodyct#benefits-risks>

³ <http://www.livestrong.com/article/19234-advantages-disadvantages-cat-scan/>

CT Scan Type _____

When do you need to make a decision? _____

What are your options?

	Benefits of Option	Rate the Importance of this Option (1-10)	Harms of Option	Rate the Importance of this Option (1-10)
Option #1				
Option #2				
Option #3				

Which option do you prefer? _____

Who else is involved in this decision?			
How important is his/her opinion to you?			
Which option does he/she prefer?			

How do you want to make this decision?

- I want to make this decision myself
- I want to make this decision with my provider's help
- I want my provider to make this decision for me
- I am not sure

If you had to choose today, what would you decide to do? _____

What additional information do you need that could help you make this decision?
