



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

CT Scanning

(Computerised Tomography)

Information for patients, relatives, and carers

① For more information, please contact:

Radiology Department

York Hospital
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE
Telephone: 01904 631313

or

Scarborough Hospital
Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL
Telephone: 01723 368111

Contents	Page
What is a CT scan?	3
Are there any risks?	4
Preparation.....	5
Once in the scanning department.....	6
Will I need an injection?.....	6
Who will do your scan?.....	8
How long does it take?	8
Are there any side effects?	9
What are the benefits and alternatives?	9
How to find the CT scanning department.....	9
Any other questions?.....	10
References	10
Tell us what you think of this leaflet?.....	11
Teaching, training and research.....	11
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).....	11
Leaflets in alternative languages or formats	12

What is a CT scan?

A CT (Computerised Tomography) scan is a type of x-ray examination, which produces cross sectional images of the body. The CT scanner consists of a doughnut shaped gantry and a scanner table. You will be asked to lie on the scanner table, which then passes through the hole in the gantry. The hole is quite wide and only about 60 centimetres deep so you should not feel confined.

An x-ray tube and electronic detectors move round inside the gantry during your scan. The x-rays pass through the part of your body being scanned and are collected by the detectors. Computers then convert this information into scan images.



Are there any risks?

Your CT scan will use x-rays. The radiation used will be the smallest amount needed to get the information we want and will usually be more than an ordinary x-ray. Radiation can cause harm, including cancer, but the benefit of the information from the CT scan will be much greater than the risk of the radiation. We can compare the radiation from the scan with the background radiation all around us (in things like rocks, building materials, food and from outer space). Your scan will give the same dose as about three years of background radiation, with a lifetime risk of getting fatal cancer of about one in 2000. This may be higher for unborn babies, young patients and those having scans of more than one body area.

Patients who are or may be pregnant must inform a member of staff in advance.

Preparation

Preparation varies depending on which part of the body is being examined. Anything we need you to do **before** you come to the department is outlined on your appointment letter. This may include not eating or drinking for a short period of time prior to coming for your scan. Many patients will now be asked to drink water before their scan. You can drink this on the way to hospital. This water helps to keep you hydrated and can help us to get better views of your stomach.

There are a few specific situations when we ask patients to drink x-ray dye. If this is required for your scan it will be detailed on your appointment letter.

If you use a stoma bag, please bring a spare with you. You may need to change it if you are unable to empty it before you are given the liquid to drink (see page 6), as the liquid will fill the bag during the examination.

Please bring with you the completed CT safety questionnaire enclosed with your appointment.

Once in the scanning department

For a head scan, you will have to remove jewellery, hairpins, and hearing aids.

For scans of the body, to save you having to change into a hospital gown, we would ask that you wear clothing that doesn't have any metal zips, buttons, buckles or other metal fastenings (including bras). Changing facilities are available for patients wishing to use hospital gowns.

For some scans of other areas, you may be asked to remove your clothing and put on an x-ray gown.

Dressing gowns are not provided so you may wish to bring your own. You will be given something to put your belongings in and you should keep this with you.

Will I need an injection?

Depending on the type of scan you are having, we may need to give you an injection of an x-ray contrast (x-ray dye). This highlights vessels and organs on the scan and helps with the diagnosis. The injection is given through a tube (cannula), which will be inserted into a vein via a needle before the procedure.

The cannula will stay in place for 15 minutes following the end of the examination, as any possible side effects are most likely to occur within this period.

The cannula will be removed before you leave the department. Very rarely, delayed reactions (up to one hour after the injection) may occur, and for this reason, we advise you not to drive until an hour after the injection.

The injection may make you feel warm all over but should not cause you undue discomfort. There is a slight risk of an allergic reaction to the contrast injection, which may lead to a skin rash or nausea ⁽¹⁾. If you present with a delayed skin reaction, please contact the department so that your record can be updated. If you have had an allergic reaction to an injection of x-ray contrast in the past you must let the radiographer know before you go in for the scan.

Very rarely the injection of x-ray contrast can cause damage to the kidneys. This only usually affects people who already have kidney problems. This is why we usually do a blood test to check for kidney problems before arranging a CT scan with a contrast injection.

If your blood test shows that you are at risk of developing any kidney damage from the dye we will tell you about this in your appointment letter and we will advise that you drink extra water before and after your scan. This keeps you hydrated and helps to flush the x-ray contrast out of your system quickly. This will reduce the risk of causing any serious kidney damage. We will then give you a blood request form so that you can get your kidney function checked three days after your CT scan.

The results of this blood test will go back to the doctor that requested your CT scan.

On rare occasions, more serious complications can occur. There is a theoretical risk of death and this is estimated to be approximately 1:170,000⁽²⁾. The Trust staff are trained to deal with any complications and the benefits from having the injection far outweigh the risks. However, it is worth bearing in mind that many thousands of scans are carried out perfectly safely within the Trust every year.

Who will do your scan?

A radiographer will carry out your scan. They will explain the procedure and answer any questions that you may have. Your scan will be reviewed and reported by a radiologist (a doctor trained in the interpretation of x-rays) but not usually until after you have left the department.

The results will be sent to the doctor who referred you for the scan and they will give the results to you.

How long does it take?

The scan itself takes about 20 minutes to complete. If we have given you something to drink beforehand, you may be in the department for up to a further hour. Occasionally there are delays because of the need to fit in emergency scans. Staff will do their best to keep any delay to a minimum.

Are there any side effects?

There should be no side effects from the scan itself. Possible side effects of the injection are explained in the section 'Will I need an injection'. After your scan you can carry on as before and eat and drink normally.

What are the benefits and alternatives?

CT gives accurate information about a wide range of medical problems. This gives your doctor important information to help in making a diagnosis and for advising on any treatment you may require. There are several alternative imaging tests available, such as plain x-rays, ultrasound, and MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging). Each has its advantages and disadvantages and, in your case, your doctor considers CT to be the investigation of choice. If you are unhappy about this, please discuss the options with the doctor who referred you for the CT scan before attending your appointment.

How to find the CT scanning department

In both York and Scarborough hospitals we have CT scanners located within the main radiology department and on mobile vans parked across different locations. Please report to the location detailed in your appointment letter.

You should allow plenty of time to find a parking space as this can sometimes take a while. The car park is pay by card on exit. In York, if the hospital car park is full there is a public car park in Union Terrace, which is just on the city centre side of the hospital and within walking distance. For Scarborough, there should be ample parking on site, with the alternative being to park in the local side streets.

Any other questions?

If you have any problems or queries, please phone the CT appointments clerk on 01904 725936 (York Hospital) or 01723 342044 (Scarborough Hospital) before your appointment. If they are unable to help, they will transfer you to someone who can. Alternatively, you can speak to the CT staff on the day of your appointment.

References

1. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists, Faculty of Clinical Radiology, Iodinated Contrast Media Guideline. Version 2.3, March 2018.
2. Morcos S K. Acute, serious, and fatal reactions to contrast media. Our current understanding. BJR (2005) 78, 686-93.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet?

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Gwen Haley, CT Radiographer Principal, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 725937 or email gwen.haley@nhs.net.

Darren Ford, CT Superintendent, Scarborough Hospital, Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL, telephone 01723 342044 or e-mail darren.ford@nhs.net.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:
www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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