



Calcium-Scoring CT Scan

How to prepare for your procedure

A calcium-scoring CT scan checks the calcium content of the major blood vessels of the heart. Read this handout to learn how the scan works, how to prepare for the scan, how the scan is performed, what to expect during the scan, and how you will get your results.

What is a calcium-scoring CT scan?

Calcium scoring is a way to check calcium content of the major blood vessels of the heart. A CT (computed tomography, or CAT scan) of the chest uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures of the organs and tissues of the chest. CT creates pictures that are far more detailed than a standard chest X-ray. CT is useful because it can show many types of tissue (the lungs, heart, bones, soft tissue, muscle and blood vessels) at the same time.

How does the scan work?

Unlike standard X-rays, which produce pictures of the shadows cast by body structures of varying thickness, CT scanning uses X-rays in a much different way. In CT of the heart, many X-ray beams are passed through the chest at many angles, and special detectors measure the amount of radiation absorbed by different tissues. The X-ray tube revolves around you, and sends and records data from many angles, forming cross-sectional pictures (slices) of the heart.

Spiral CT units produce higher-quality pictures in a shorter time, an important feature for children, for patients who are elderly or critically ill, and those who can't hold their breath for a long time.

How should I prepare for the CT scan?

- Dress comfortably, but avoid any tops with zippers, snaps or jewelry, since metal objects may affect the scan.
- If you are pregnant or might be pregnant, you must tell the CT technologist.

Questions?

Call 206-598-6200

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC Clinic staff are also available to help at any time.

Imaging Services
206-598-6200

How is the CT scan performed?

1. You will be placed on the CT table. Pillows may be used to help you maintain the correct position during the scan.
2. For the first few scans, the table will move quickly through the scanner to set the correct starting placement.
3. The rest of the scans are made as the table moves more slowly through the tunnel in the scanner. The best chest CT scans result when you can hold your breath. If you can't hold your breath, you will be asked to breathe quietly and regularly.
4. After the CT scan is done, you may have to wait a short time while the radiologist checks the scans for quality. A few more scans will be done as needed.

What will I feel during the procedure?

CT scanning is painless. You will be alone during the scan, but the technologist can see and hear you, and can speak to you at any time from the control room. The scan usually takes 15 to 30 minutes, including set-up time. The actual scan time is less than 30 seconds.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist experienced in CT scanning will examine and interpret the CT findings. The radiologist will send a detailed report to your primary care or referring doctor, who will give you the results. The radiologist will not discuss the results with you.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
MEDICAL CENTER
UW Medicine

Imaging Services

Box 357115

1959 N.E. Pacific St. Seattle, WA 98195
206-598-6200