



# CT Neck Scan

*How to prepare for your procedure*

**CT scans use a special X-ray machine to get detailed information on neck injuries, tumors, and other neck diseases. Read this handout to learn how the CT of the neck works, how to prepare for the scan, how the scan is performed, what to expect during the scan, and how to get your results.**

## What is a CT neck scan?

CT (computed tomography, or CAT scan) uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures of the organs and tissues of the neck. CT scans provide more details on neck injuries, tumors, and other diseases than plain X-ray pictures. CT can also show bone, soft tissues, and blood vessels in the same pictures.

## 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 neck, many X-ray beams are passed through the neck 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 of the neck, forming cross-sectional pictures.

## How should I prepare for the CT scan?

- Dress comfortably. Remove any metals that might obstruct scans of the neck such as earrings, glasses, dentures, dental implants, or bras.
- You will be asked not to eat anything 4 hours before your exam if you will receive *contrast material* – a substance that highlights the neck and its blood vessels. You may continue to drink clear liquids (water, clear juices, or tea) until your scan. It is important for you to drink often before and after your scan. Drinking water helps remove contrast from your kidneys. Continue to take your regular medicines as prescribed by your doctor.
- If an intravenous (IV) injection of a contrast material is used, you will be asked in advance whether you have had allergies in the past or have ever had a serious reaction to any medicine. Contrast materials contain iodine, which can cause a reaction if you are allergic. If you have known allergies to other medicine, there may be a chance that you could have a reaction to the contrast material. In this case, we will ask you to take medicine to prevent a reaction to the CT contrast material before your scan.

## Questions?

Call 206-598-6200

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

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206-598-6200

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- Tell the technologist if you have asthma, multiple myeloma, or any disorder of the heart, kidneys, or thyroid gland, or if you have diabetes – particularly if you are taking Glucophage.
- Tell your doctor or CT technologist if there is a chance you might be pregnant.

### How is the CT scan performed?

1. You will lie on a table, and soft straps or tape will help to keep your neck in the proper position.
2. You will stay still while the table is guided into the center of the scanner.
3. For the first few scans, the table will move quickly through the scanner to check the correct starting position. The rest of the scans are made as the table moves slowly through the hole in the scanner.
4. If contrast material is needed for your scan, a small needle connected to an IV line is placed in your arm or hand vein. The contrast material will be sent through this line.
5. A CT exam of the neck can take up to 15 minutes to complete. All images will be checked for quality before you leave.

### What will I feel during the scan?

- CT is painless.
- If a contrast is used, you may notice a warm, flushed sensation during the injection of contrast material. You may also notice a metallic taste in your mouth that lasts for about 2 minutes. These reactions are normal and go away within 1 to 2 minutes.
- Once in a while, a patient will develop itching and hives for up to a few hours after the injection. This can be relieved with medicine. Light-headedness or shortness of breath may be due to a more severe allergic reaction – a doctor, nurse, and technologist will be nearby during the exam to help you, if needed.
- Because CT uses X-rays, you may not have a family member or friend in the CT room during the exam.

### Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

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

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