

Society for Vascular Nursing Patient Education: Computerized Tomography (CT) Scan

What is a Computerized Tomography Scan?

A Computerized Tomography scan; also called a CT Scan, is a special x-ray that creates multiple pictures of muscle, bone and tissues.

CT Angiography (CTA) uses contrast and acts like a highlighter as it flows through the arteries and veins. This is used to evaluate blood vessels, identifying narrowing or abnormalities such as aneurysms.

Why is a CT scan done?

Your healthcare provider may order a CT Scan to:

1. Evaluate muscle, bone, tissues or blood vessels
2. Locate blood clots, narrowing of blood vessels, aneurysms or tumors in the body
3. Monitor problems such as cancer, heart disease, or aneurysms, and
4. Guide or plan a surgery or procedure

How to Get Ready for a CT Scan?

Tell your healthcare provider if you:

1. Are or could be pregnant
2. Take medications for diabetes
3. Have an allergy to shellfish, iodine or x-ray contrast

If you are diabetic or have a problem with your kidneys (renal insufficiency), your healthcare provider may ask that you take medications to protect your kidneys. They may also ask you to drink more fluids before and after the CT scan. The increased fluids help to clear the contrast used for the CT scan from your body. Your healthcare provider may ask you not to eat for about four (4) hours before the test.

What to expect?

A CT scan is painless. The test may take about 30 minutes. The scanner looks like a large donut

1. You may be asked to wear a hospital gown and remove your jewelry.
2. You may be given contrast that will highlight the part of your body being scanned. The contrast can be a drink or given to you through a needle in your vein (intravenous).
3. You will be asked to lie on a very narrow table.
4. Do not move as the table is moved slowly into the scanner.
5. The scanner will move in a circle around you, you may hear some buzzing sounds.
6. If you have questions or fears during your CT scan, talk with the healthcare provider performing the test; they will be able to hear you at all times.

Remember to drink plenty of fluids after the scan is completed unless otherwise advised by your healthcare provider.