

Preparing for a CT Abdomen Scan

What is a computed tomography (CT) scan of the abdomen?

A computed tomography (CT) scan is an imaging test that uses X-rays and a computer to make detailed images of the body. A CT scan shows details of the bones, muscles, fat, soft tissues, organs and blood vessels. CT scans are more detailed than regular X-rays.

In a CT scan, an X-ray beam moves in a circle around your body. This allows many different views of the same part of the body. The X-ray information is sent to a computer, which interprets the X-ray data and displays it on a monitor. CT scans can give healthcare providers more information about injuries or diseases of the abdominal organs.

During some tests, you may receive contrast material (called “contrast dye”). This can be given orally, through a vein, or both ways. It makes parts of your body show up better in the image.

Why might I need a CT scan of the abdomen?

The abdomen contains many organs. These include the gastrointestinal, urinary, endocrine and reproductive organs. A CT scan of the abdomen may be used to check the abdomen and its organs for:

- Tumors or other lesions
- Injuries
- Bleeding
- Infections
- Blood vessel problems
- Unexplained belly pain
- Blockages
- Other health problems

A CT scan may be done when another type of examination, such as an X-ray or a physical exam, is not conclusive. It may also be used to check tumors and other conditions of the abdomen before and after treatment. It can also be done to guide the needle during biopsies and other procedures. (A biopsy is when a small piece of tissue is removed so it can be examined in the lab.)

There may be other reasons that you may need a CT scan of the abdomen. Check with your healthcare provider for more information.

How should I prepare for a CT scan of the abdomen?

- Your healthcare provider will explain the scan to you and give you a chance to ask any questions.
- If your CT scan involves the use of contrast dye, you will be asked to sign a consent form that gives permission to do the scan. Read the form carefully and ask questions if anything is not clear.
- Tell the technologist if you have ever had a reaction to contrast dyes or if you are allergic to iodine.
- Generally, there is no fasting (not eating) requirement prior to a CT scan, unless a contrast dye is to be used. Your healthcare provider will give you special instructions ahead of time if contrast is to be used and you won't be able to eat or drink.
- Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines, vitamins, herbs and supplements you are taking.
- Tell the technologist if you are pregnant or think you could be pregnant.
- Tell the technologist if you have any body piercings on your chest or abdomen.
- Based on your medical condition, your healthcare provider may request other preparations.
- If you are claustrophobic, talk with your healthcare provider about medicine to take before the test to help relieve claustrophobia.

What can I expect during a CT scan of the abdomen?

You may have a CT scan as an outpatient or as part of your stay in a hospital. Procedures may vary depending on your condition.

Generally, a CT scan of the abdomen follows this process:

1. You will be asked to remove any clothing, jewelry or other objects that may interfere with the scan.
2. If you are asked to remove clothing, you will be given a gown to wear.

3. If you are to have a scan done with contrast, an IV line will be started in your hand or arm for injection of the contrast dye. For oral contrast, you will be given a liquid contrast to drink. In some situations, the contrast may be given rectally.
4. You will lie on a narrow scan table that slides into a large, circular opening of the ring-shaped scanning machine. Pillows and straps may be used to help prevent movement during the scan.
5. The technologist will be in another room where the scanner controls are located. However, you will be able to see the technologist through a window at all times. Speakers inside the scanner will allow the technologist to talk to you and hear you. You will have a call button so that you can let the technologist know if you have any problems during the scan. The technologist will be watching you at all times and will be in constant communication.
6. As the scanner begins to rotate around you, X-rays will pass through your body for short amounts of time. You will hear clicking and whirring sounds, which are normal.
7. The X-rays absorbed by the body's tissues will be found by the scanner and sent to the computer. The computer will assemble the information into an image to be interpreted by the radiologist.
8. It is important that you stay very still during the scan. You may be asked to hold your breath for a short time at various points during the scan.
9. If contrast dye is used, you may feel some effects when the dye is injected into the IV line. These effects include a warm, flushing sensation, a salty or metallic taste in the mouth, a brief headache, or nausea. These effects usually last only a few moments.
10. You should tell the technologist if you have any trouble breathing, sweating, numbness or heart palpitations.
11. When the scan has been completed, you will be removed from the scanner.
12. If an IV line was inserted, it will be removed.
13. You may be asked to wait for a short period of time while the radiologist examines the scans to make sure they are clear.

While a CT scan itself causes no pain, having to lie still for the length of the procedure might cause some discomfort or pain, particularly if you've recently been

injured or had surgery. The technologist will use all possible comfort measures and complete the procedure as quickly as possible to minimize any discomfort or pain.

This information is provided by Inova Imaging.