

Five ways to Decrease Your Exposure to Medical Radiation

1. Avoid Unnecessary Tests

Only get a test if the result will change your medical care. Speak with your provider.

2. Discuss Other Options with Your Provider

Other, less harmful tests may be appropriate. Ask your provider about ultrasounds or MRIs. Pick the test that will best answer the medical question.

3. Use University or Academic Medical Centers

These centers often try to lower your exposure. They may also have medical physicists and state-of-the-art equipment.

4. Avoid Unnecessary Repeat Exams

If you have recently had CT scans or X-rays at one hospital and you move, ask for them to be put on a CD. You can bring the CD with you to the new hospital or provider's office. Don't repeat a test out of convenience.

5. Avoid the Emergency Room

The Emergency Room's goal is to quickly identify the patients who need care the most. CT scans and X-rays are often used to help figure out who needs care right away.

How much radiation does a person get from medical imaging?

Type of Medical Imaging	Radiation Is Equal To How Many Chest X-Rays?
CT Scan	100 to 800
Nuclear Medicine Study	10 to 2,050
Fluoroscopic procedure	250 to 3,500

Additional Questions?

The 24/7 Nurse Helpline is staffed by Registered Nurses and is available to help you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. A Registered Nurse will answer your questions or help you to understand a medical condition or test. Call 1.800.859.9889 and follow the prompts for the Nurse Helpline.

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ATTENTION: If you speak a language other than English, language assistance services are available to you, free of charge. Call 1.800.859.9889 (TTY: 711) for assistance.

Español (Spanish):

ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1.800.859.9889 (TTY: 711).

Português (Portuguese):

ATENÇÃO: Se fala português, encontram-se disponíveis serviços linguísticos, grátis. Ligue para 1.800.859.9889 (TTY: 711).

Frequently Asked Questions about Diagnostic Imaging

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Diagnostic Imaging

Frequently Asked Questions About Diagnostic Imaging



Diagnostic Imaging FAQ

What are the benefits of medical imaging tests?

Medical imaging can help you and your providers in many ways. These tests help providers find and treat many conditions. The tests reduce the need for and improve many surgical procedures. It can even make some therapies safer. These images can also help shorten your hospital stay.

Is there a radiation risk from medical imaging tests?

Yes, there can be a radiation risk. The amount of radiation depends on the type of test. Talk with your provider about whether the test is necessary. If the answer is yes, have the test done. You can ask your provider if there are other tests like an ultrasound or MRI that can be used instead.

X-rays are the oldest and most often used imaging tests. They are painless tests used to look at bones. X-rays use low doses of radiation to get the clearest image. Digital X-rays use 80-90% less radiation.

Computed tomography (CT) and positron emission tomography (PET-CT) scans use more radiation than an X-ray. CT scans are often used to look inside the chest and abdomen. CT scans use radiation and a computer to create pictures. While CT scans have lots of radiation, the benefits are greater than the risks, especially if you have a family history of cancer.

Common Medical Imaging Tests Include:

- X-ray
- CT Scan
- Nuclear Medicine Study
- Fluoroscopic procedure
- MRI
- Ultrasound

Is there a test that can show if you have had too much radiation?

No, there is no test for lifetime radiation exposure from imaging tests. That is why you should keep track of the imaging you have had performed.

How can I keep track of my medical imaging tests?

Use the My Medical Imaging History card to keep track of all your imaging tests. Use this list to discuss any new tests that your provider orders. The goal is to reduce repeat tests if your provider does not know your imaging history. To download this card visit www.ct.gov/husky, click "For Members," then "Your Health Wallet" under the "Health & Wellness" menu item.

What is a CT scan?

CT scans let providers see inside your body without surgery. During a CT scan, a detector moves around your body and records many X-ray images. A computer then builds pictures or "slices" of organs and tissues. CT scans have the most medical radiation. A CT scan usually takes between 30-45 minutes.

What should I expect during a CT scan?

CT scanners look like a tube with a spinning detector that collects images. For some tests, your radiologist may ask that you do not eat for one or more hours before the scan. If necessary, your provider may use a dye called contrast (see next question for information on contrast).

During the scan, you lie on a table on your back. The table moves your body slowly, through the tube. As you move through the tube, your technician will be able to see, hear, and speak to you. It is important for you to remain as still as possible to get the clearest images.

What is contrast or contrast material? Why is it used? What are the risks?

Contrast or contrast material, is a dye that is used to help some body parts stand out in the image. The contrast is given to you by injection or by drinking a flavored liquid. Contrast materials such as barium or iodine, are used to look at blood vessels in the body.

Tell your providers about all of your medications. Let them know if you have any allergies, especially to barium or iodine contrast materials. If you have an allergy to X-ray contrast material, your providers may give you a special medication. You should take this medication as prescribed. It will help to reduce the risk of a reaction.

The risk of a serious reaction to iodine contrast is very rare. Radiology departments are well-equipped to deal with these issues. If you have an allergy, your provider may recommend a test that does not need contrast. Also, tell your providers if you have been sick recently or if you have any other medical conditions.

If I am breastfeeding, what precautions should I take?

You should wait 24 hours after contrast material is injected before breastfeeding. Sometimes the contrast used for the study may pass into the milk and it will pass to the child. It is important to talk to your provider and the technician before the test begins. You may be asked to stop breastfeeding for a short while, pump your breasts in the meantime, and discard the milk (pump and dump). Breastfeeding can often resume shortly afterwards.