

WHAT IS A CT SCAN OF THE HEAD?

A head or brain CT is used to evaluate the various structures of the brain to look for a mass, stroke, area of bleeding, or blood vessel abnormality. It is also sometimes used to look at the skull. A CT scan of the head can give some information about the eyes, facial bones, air-filled cavities (sinuses) within the bones around the nose, and the inner ear. If these areas are of concern, a specific CT scan of the area is usually done.

HOW IT WORKS

Your physician may order this test with or without a contrast agent depending on your diagnosis. If contrast material is used, it will be swallowed, injected through an intravenous line (IV) or administered by enema, depending on the type of examination. The contrast is an iodinated contrast so please inform the technologist if you are allergic to iodine or any type of contrast agent. Please inform the technologist if you are pregnant. Many imaging tests are not preformed during pregnancy.

If your exam was ordered with an oral contrast agent you will need to arrive 2 hours prior to your test to start drinking the contrast.

Please be advised of the following information before receiving any contrast agent. If you have ever had an allergic reaction to any contrast agent, you may require a steroid prep the day before the test. Please consult your physician in regards to the steroid prep. If you are age 40 or older or a diabetic; you will need labs drawn prior to your contrasted exam. Please consult your physician in regards to these labs. If you are a dialysis patient please consult with your physician prior to receiving any contrast agent.

WHAT TO EXPECT

The test may require you to lay flat, lay on your stomach, or on your side. Multiple images of your anatomy will be taken. You must be still during the exam, because movement causes blurred images. Your technician may ask you to hold your breath sometimes and keep still to get a more accurate picture.

Most CT scans take about 30 minutes. If you are receiving an oral contrast, please include the 2 hour drink time in addition to the 30 minute scan. The technologist will give you discharge instructions after the completion of the test.

HOW TO PREPARE

Follow these guidelines:

- Avoid eating or drinking for 4 hours prior to your scan if are to receive a contrast agent.
- Non-diabetic medications may be taken with a sip of water.
- If you are diabetic, please consult your physician as to any special instructions concerning your diabetes medication prior to the test.
- Please bring your current home medications or a list of your medications with you the day of the test.
- Depending on the part of your body getting the CT scan, you may need to change into a hospital gown to get a more accurate picture.
- Remove jewelry, removable dental hardware, eye glasses, and any metal objects or clothing that might interfere with the images.

RESULTS

A radiologist will review your images and send a report to your doctor who ordered the test in 48 hours. You'll get a call from your doctor's office to discuss the results and next steps. To check your results in our secure, online patient portal, My UNC Chart, visit www.myuncchart.org.