

CT: Calcium-Scoring Scan

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains how a calcium-scoring CT scan works, how to prepare, how it is done, what to expect during the scan, and how you will get your results.

What is a calcium-scoring CT scan?

Calcium scoring is a way to check how much calcium is in the major blood vessels of your heart. A *computed tomography* (CT) scan of the chest uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures of the organs and tissues in your chest. CT can show many types of tissue (the lungs, heart, bones, soft tissue, muscle and blood vessels) in the same image.

How does the scan work?

In a calcium-scoring CT scan, many X-ray beams are passed through the chest at many angles. The X-ray tube revolves around you, and takes pictures from many angles, forming cross-section images (*slices*) of your heart. Your doctor will review the pictures on a computer.

How should I prepare?

- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes on the day of your scan.
- You may be asked to remove any jewelry or tops with metal zippers or snaps. Metal objects may affect the scan.
- *Women:* Tell your doctor or CT technologist if there is any chance you are pregnant.

How is the scan done?

- The CT technologist will help you lie down on the CT table. Pillows may be used to help you stay in the right position during the scan.



For your scan, the CT technologist will help you get into position on the CT table.



A CT image of the heart

- The technologist will then leave the room. You will be alone during the scan, but the technologist can see and hear you, and can speak to you at any time through an intercom.
- You will lie still while the table moves into the center of the scanner. You will also need to hold still when the scans are being done. Holding still during the scan results in the best CT pictures.
- For the first few scans, the table will move quickly through the scanner. These first scans check the correct starting position. For the rest of the scans, the table moves more slowly through the scanner.
- After the CT scan is done, you may have to wait a short time while the radiologist checks the scans for quality. A few more scans may be done, if needed.
- The procedure usually takes about 15 to 30 minutes, including set-up time. The actual scan time takes less than 30 seconds.
- Because CT uses X-rays, you may not have a family member or friend in the CT room during the scan.

What will I feel during the scan?

- CT scanning is painless.
- The technologist will ask you to hold your breath for about 30 seconds while the actual scan is being done. This helps provide the best chest scans. If you cannot hold your breath, the CT technologist will ask you to breathe quietly and slowly.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

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

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- UWMC Imaging Services:
206.598.6200
- UW Roosevelt Radiology:
206.598.6868