

CT: Musculoskeletal (MSK) Scan

How to prepare and what to expect

This handout explains a musculoskeletal (MSK) CT scan. It describes how CT works, how to prepare for your scan, how it is done, what to expect during the scan, and how to get your results.

What is an MSK CT scan?

A *musculoskeletal (MSK) computed tomography (CT) scan* uses a special X-ray machine to take detailed pictures of the bones and joints. CT scans show many types of tissues and organs in the same image

How does the MSK CT scan work?

During the scan, you will lie inside the CT machine. Many X-ray beams will be passed through your bones and joints as the X-ray tube revolves around you. The machine will take pictures from many angles, forming cross-section images (*slices*) of the area. Your doctor will review the pictures on a computer.

How should I prepare?

- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothing on the day of your scan.
- Metal objects can affect the image, so do not wear clothing with zippers and snaps.
- You may be asked to remove hairpins, jewelry, eyeglasses, hearing aids, and any removable dental work that could cause problems with the images.
- *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 get into position on the CT table. Pillows will be used to help you stay in position during the scan.



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

- The technologist will then leave the room. You will be alone in the room during the scan, but the technologist can see, hear, and speak with you through an intercom at all times.
- 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.
- An MSK CT scan usually takes 5 minutes to half an hour. When the scan is over, we may ask you to wait while we check the images for quality. A few more scans may be done, if needed.

What will I feel during the scan?

- CT scanning does not cause any pain. You may feel some discomfort from needing to hold still during the scans.
- Because CT uses X-rays, you may not have a family member or friend in the CT room during the scan.
- For young patients, a parent may be able to stay in the room with their child to help reduce fear and provide comfort. The parent will need to wear a lead apron to limit exposure to the radiation used in the scan.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist skilled in CT scanning will review and interpret the CT findings. 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, who 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
- Harborview Imaging
Services:
206.744.3105