Computed
Tomography (CT) Scan

Changi
General Hospital
SingHealth

What is CT scan?

CT scan uses x-rays to capture cross-sectional images of your body.

X-ray information will be analysed by the computer to generate the cross sectional images. Multi-planar or 3D images can be reconstructed for detailed investigation.
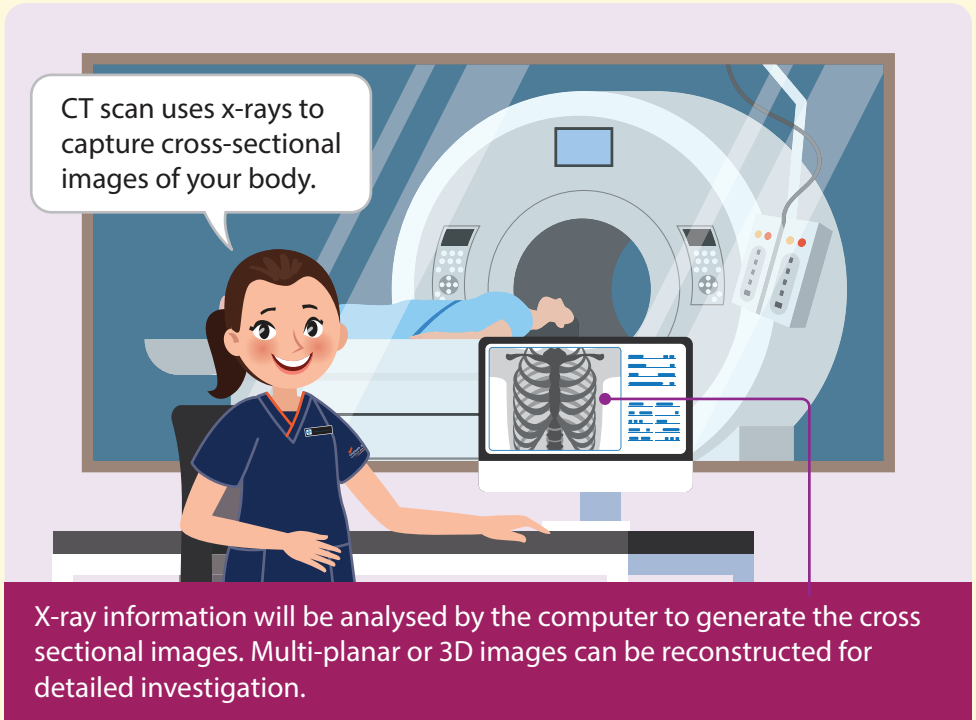
Computed tomography (CT) scan is used to capture images of major internal organs, blood vessels and bones.

Depending on the type of disease or medical condition, CT scan can be used in conjunction with other imaging techniques like ultrasound and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), to help doctors diagnose the condition and recommend suitable treatment.

Is it a safe procedure?

While it is a safe procedure, the CT scan is not recommended for pregnant women.

Unborn babies are more sensitive to the effects of radiation compared to adults. This is especially so during the early stages of pregnancy where any radiation damage can potentially cause birth defects or even death. Hence, it is important to inform the doctor or radiographer, before the test, if you are pregnant or suspect that you may be pregnant, so that they can take the necessary precaution.

What is CT contrast?

Some scans require contrast (special dye) to be injected via a plastic cannula in your vein, to highlight certain structures in your body.

Some people will experience a warm sensation as the contrast flows through their body while others may notice a funny taste in their mouth.

I am aware that patients who previously had a contrast allergy or experienced asthma like myself may be prescribed medication before the scan. This reduces the risk of an allergic reaction or asthma attack during the contrast injection.

Studies suggest that it is safe for mothers who are breastfeeding to continue to do so even after taking the contrast injection. This is because only a very small percentage of contrast medium is excreted into the breast milk. If you are concerned about any potential ill effects to the infant, you may abstain from breastfeeding for about 12-24 hours from the time of the contrast injection.

The CT contrast dye may not be suitable for patients with poor kidney function. With poor kidney function, the patient may not be able to effectively excrete the dye from the body, which could pose health risks.

Always alert your doctor and radiographer beforehand if you have the condition mentioned above.

What do I need to prepare?

Fasting is required before taking the contrast injection, because it may trigger nausea or vomiting. For specific instructions, please refer to the patient preparation sheet given to you when you book your appointment.

NO FOOD AND DRINKS

REMOVE ALL METALLIC ITEMS

No preparation is required for the scan if you are not given any contrast injection.

Any metallic items on your body will affect the data collection, resulting in inaccuracy of the images generated. Please remove them before the scan.

Sometimes, you may be asked to drink some water before the scan. This is to outline your digestive tract or fill your bladder so as to product clearer images during the scan.

For more information, please refer to the patient information sheet provided at the point of appointment booking.

What happens during the scan?

During the scan, you will feel the scan table move under you. The velcro-strap is to prevent you from slipping off the table.

I will try to keep still and follow the breathing instructions given during the scan.

The scan will take about 5 to 15 minutes. It is important to keep still to capture a clear image. The scanning device within the CT machine which emits the x-rays will rotate around the scan table. X-rays that passes through your body will be captured by the detectors located opposite the scanning device in the CT machine. This information is then analysed by the computer which will produce cross-sectional images of your body for detailed investigations by your radiologist.

What happens after the scan?
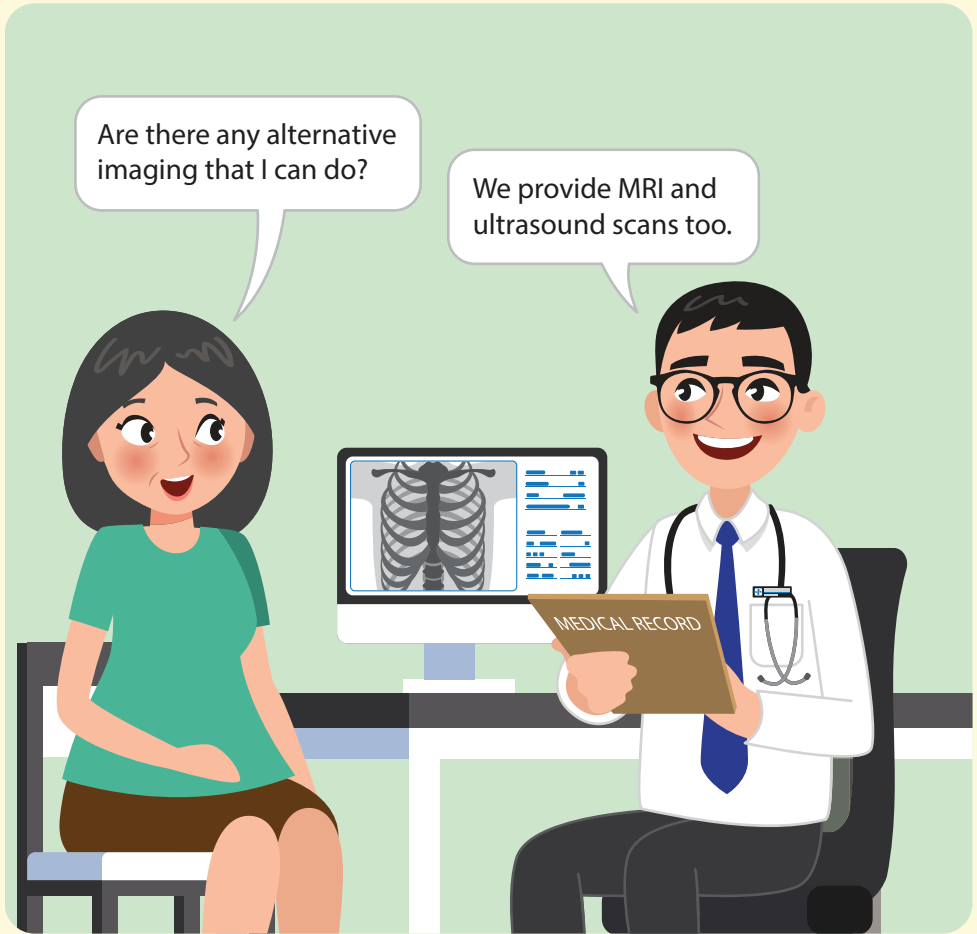
Your doctor will discuss the results with you at your next appointment.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and ultrasound scans are two other common imaging options that your doctor may consider in place of CT scan. Your doctor will select a suitable imaging technique for your condition. Do speak to your doctor if you have any concerns.

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