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Our Locations:

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(831) 476-7711

Dominican Breast Center, L.L.C.
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Santa Cruz, CA 95065
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Dominican MRI Center
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Santa Cruz Comprehensive Imaging, L.L.C.
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RADIOLOGY MEDICAL GROUP OF
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, INC.

CT SCAN

Computed Tomography



*Medical imaging dedicated to
providing the service you deserve.*

What is CT Scanning of the Body?

Computed tomography, more commonly known as a CT or CAT scan, is a diagnostic medical test that, like traditional X-rays, produces multiple images or pictures of the inside of the body. The cross-sectional images generated during a CT scan can be reformatted in multiple planes, and can even generate three-dimensional images. These images can be viewed on a computer monitor or transferred to a CD.

Using specialized equipment and expertise to create and interpret CT scans of the body, radiologists can more easily diagnose problems such as cancers, infectious disease, appendicitis, trauma and musculoskeletal disorders.

How is the CT scan performed?

The technologist begins by positioning you on the CT examination table, usually lying flat on your back or less commonly, on your side or on your stomach. Straps and pillows may be used to help you maintain the correct position and to help you remain still during the exam. Depending on the part of the body being scanned, you may be asked to raise your arms over your head.

If contrast material is used, depending on the type of exam, it will be swallowed, injected through an intravenous line (IV) or administered by enema (this is rare).

Next, the table will move quickly through the scanner to determine the correct starting position for the scans. Then, the table will move slowly through the machine as the actual CT scanning is performed. Depending on the type of CT scan, the machine may make several passes.

You may be asked to hold your breath during the scanning. Any motion, whether breathing or body movement, can lead to artifacts on the images. This loss of image quality can resemble the blurring seen on a photograph taken of a moving object.

The CT examination is usually completed within 30 minutes. The portion requiring intravenous contrast injection usually lasts only 10 to 30 seconds.

What will I experience during and after the procedure?

CT scans are generally painless, fast and easy. With multidetector CT, the amount of time that the patient needs to lie still is reduced.

Though the scanning itself causes no pain, there may be some discomfort from having to remain still for several minutes and with placement of an IV. If you have a hard time staying still, are very nervous or anxious, or have chronic pain, you may find a CT scan to be stressful.

For scans (excluding head and neck) your head will remain outside the hole in the center of the scanner. The scanner is approximately 24 inches wide, therefore, your entire body will be "inside" the scanner at one time such as with MRI.

If an intravenous contrast material is used, you will feel a pin prick when the needle is inserted into your vein. You will likely have a warm, flushed sensation during the injection of the contrast material and a metallic taste in your mouth that lasts for at most a minute or two. You may experience a sensation like you have to urinate; however, this is actually a contrast effect and subsides quickly.

If the contrast material is swallowed, you may find the taste mildly unpleasant; however, most patients can easily tolerate it. You can expect to experience a sense of abdominal fullness and an increasing need to expel the liquid if your contrast material is given by enema. In this case, be patient, as the mild discomfort will not last long.

You will be alone in the exam room during the CT scan, unless there are special circumstances. However, the technologist will always be able to see, hear and speak with you through a built-in intercom system.

After a CT scan, you can return to your normal activities. If you received contrast material, you may be given special instructions.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist with expertise in supervising and interpreting radiology examinations, will analyze the images and send a signed report to your primary care physician or physician who referred you for the scan, who will discuss the results with you.

Follow-up examinations may be necessary, and your doctor will explain the exact reason why another scan is requested. Sometimes a follow-up scan is done because a suspicious or questionable finding needs clarification with additional views or a special imaging technique. A follow-up examination may also be necessary so that any change in a known abnormality can be monitored over time. Follow-up examinations are sometimes the best way to see if treatment is working or if an abnormality is stable over time.