

Imaging department

Having a CT scan

Information for patients

What is a CT scan?

CT stands for computed tomography, which means taking a series of painless x-rays that provide detailed cross-sectional pictures of the head and body. Using this technique, we are able to look in detail at the soft tissue and bones of the head and body. We may also use a special dye (known as 'contrast medium') to highlight certain areas during the scan. CT helps doctors to identify or locate deep-seated disease or conditions that are not normally visible with conventional x-rays.

What are the risks and benefits of having a CT scan?

The benefit of a CT scan is that it is a relatively safe and quick procedure, which gives your doctors detailed information about the blood supply to the area being examined.

There is a very small risk associated with CT examinations because, as with all x-ray examinations it requires the use of ionising radiation. However, CT scans have a long track record for being safe as well as providing doctors with vital diagnostic information.

There is also a small risk of reaction to the contrast medium if used in the examination. This is very rare and occurs in 0.0025 per cent or one in 40,000 patients.

The radiologist (x-ray doctor) or radiographer performing the procedure will discuss these risk factors with you before starting and will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Are there any alternatives to this test?

A CT scan will only have been requested by your doctor if he/she feels that this is the best way to find out more information about your condition.

Other tests such as ultrasound or MRI scans can also give information, but not in the same detail as this examination.

Is there anything I need to do before my CT scan?

- You can take all your medications as usual except metformin (drug for diabetes) – see appointment letter. If you take metformin, it is very important that you inform the ward staff or the imaging department staff.
- Please also let us know if you have asthma or are allergic to any medications or to the contrast medium (dye) used for CT scanning.
- We also try to avoid doing scans on pregnant women in the first three months of pregnancy, so please tell your doctor and the radiographer if you are pregnant or think you may be before the scan.
- Please also tell us if you have had a recent CT scan here or at another hospital.

-
- Please see your appointment letter for details about any preparation required before you have the test. This will depend upon the area of your body that is being investigated.

What if I cannot keep my appointment?

Please contact us as soon as possible. We can then offer this date to another patient and agree a new appointment date and time with you.

You will find the appropriate telephone number on your appointment letter.

What happens on the day of my appointment?

If you are already staying in hospital as an inpatient, you will be brought down from the ward to the imaging department. If you are having the scan as an outpatient, we will ask you to come straight to the imaging department.

The radiographer will check your details and may ask you to change into a hospital gown. You will need to remove any jewellery (including body piercings and watches) or metal from the area being examined.

What happens afterwards?

If your scan was done as an outpatient appointment, you will be allowed to go home once the doctor/nurse/radiographer is satisfied with your condition.

If your scan was done as an inpatient, you will be taken back to the ward.

Is there anything I need to watch out for at home?

This will depend upon your medical condition and the type of scan you had. Your doctor and, nurse or radiographer will advise you about any precautions you need to take and what to do about any symptoms you may experience.

Contact details

Please do not hesitate to contact our imaging departments if you have any queries or concerns:

- **Charing Cross Hospital:** Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8RF
Telephone: **020 3311 1863**
- **Hammersmith Hospital:** Du Cane Road, London W12 0HS
Telephone: **020 3313 3389**
- **St Mary's Hospital:** Praed Street, London W2 1NY
Telephone: **020 3312 6418**

How do I get to the hospital?

You are advised to travel, if possible, by public transport when visiting our hospitals. Car parking is severely limited and you may find it very difficult to find a place to park near the hospital.

The nearest tube stations for **Hammersmith Hospital** are East Acton and White City (both on the Central Line) and Wood Lane (Hammersmith & City Line). Buses that stop outside the hospital are numbers 7, 70, 72, 272 and 283.

The nearest tube stations for **Charing Cross Hospital** are Hammersmith (District, Piccadilly and Hammersmith & City lines) and Barons Court (District and Piccadilly lines).

Buses that stop outside the hospital are numbers 190, 211, 220 and 295.

The nearest tube stations for **St Mary's Hospital** are Paddington mainline station, while Paddington and Edgware Road tube stations are about five minutes' walk away. St Mary's Hospital is served by bus routes 7, 23, 27, 36, 205, 332 and 436.

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at pals@imperial.nhs.uk. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to express your concerns in **writing** to:

Complaints department
Fourth floor
Salton House
St Mary's Hospital
Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print, as a sound recording, in Braille, or in alternative languages. Please contact the communications team on **020 3312 5592**.

Wi-fi

We have a free and premium wi-fi service at each of our five hospitals. For further information please visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

Imaging department
Published: Oct 2016
Review date: Oct 2019
Reference no: 2707
© Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust