

Preparing for DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING

Learn what to expect before, during, and after diagnostic imaging tests, including how to prepare for your appointment and questions to discuss with your healthcare team



01 WHAT IS DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING

Diagnostic imaging refers to medical tests that create pictures (images) of the inside of the body. These images can provide information about the size of the cancer, location, and spread of cancer. This information helps diagnose, determine treatment planning, and determine if treatment has worked.

TYPES OF DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING

Ultrasound

- Uses high-frequency sound waves (no radiation).
- Commonly used to examine lymph nodes or soft tissues, especially in the head and neck.

CT Scan (Computerized Tomography)

- Uses multiple X-ray images to create detailed “slices” of the body (like a loaf of bread) which are combined by a computer for detailed cross-sectional views.
- Helps visualize lymph nodes, organs, and deeper structures.

MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging)

- Uses magnetic fields and radio waves to create detailed 3-D images.
- Often used to see soft tissue and deeper structures.

PET/CT Scan (Positron Emission Tomography) combined with CT

- Uses small amounts of radioactive tracer to show metabolic activity.
- Often used for staging cancer or detecting spread.

Key Questions to Ask Your Oncologist

- What is the purpose of the test?
- Are there alternatives?
- How and when will I get my results?
- Will my insurance cover the test?



Tip: Some tests require prior authorization. Confirm approval with your insurance company before your appointment.

02 HOW TO PREPARE FOR DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING?

BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT

- Be sure to **carefully follow** all preparation instructions (diet, medications, etc).
- **Wear** comfortable clothing.
- **Know** your appointment location.
- **Arrive** at least 15 minutes early to allow for check-in and preparation.
- If **you are late**, your test may need to be rescheduled.
- **Bring a list** of medications and allergies.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Diabetes and Medications

- If you have **diabetes**, some medications (especially metformin) may need to be withheld before or after your imaging test, particularly if contrast dye is used.
- It is important that you **follow the instructions** given to you regarding your diabetes medications.
- If you have **questions or are unsure**, contact your healthcare provider or the imaging center well ahead of your appointment.

TIP



- Wear your hearing aids if needed so you can fully hear the test instructions, though you may be asked to remove them during the test.
- Bring / wear glasses for reading and signing paperwork. You may be asked to remove your glasses during the test.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS (CONTINUED)

Kidney Function and Bloodwork

- Certain imaging studies use contrast dye that is processed by the **kidneys**.
- **Pre-scan bloodwork** may be required to check your kidney function.
- Generally, bloodwork is required within 30 days of the scan, **however this may vary by facility**-confirm directly with your imaging center.

Contrast Allergies: **IMPORTANT**


- Tell your healthcare provider and the diagnostic imaging team right away if you have ever had a **reaction to contrast dye (CT or MRI contrast)**, even if the reaction was mild.
- **Reactions may include** rash, itching, sneezing, swelling, trouble breathing, or feeling faint.
- You may need **pre-medication** or a **different test**.



03 EXAM-SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

Preparation may vary by facility- confirm directly with your imaging center

ULTRASOUND

- You may **receive instructions** depending on the part of the body being imaged but generally does not require any preparation.
 - You may be asked to **change into a medical gown**.
 - You will **lie down** on an examination table.
 - A **clear gel** is applied to the skin over the area being examined to help transmit sound waves. A small, hand-held device, called a transducer, is pressed against the skin surface above the area to be viewed.
 - The test is **painless** and usually lasts 15 minutes.
- 

CT SCAN

- You may be asked to **fast** for several hours before the scan.
- You may be asked to **change into a medical gown**.
- You will **lie on table** that slides into a large donut-shaped machine. The table slowly moves through the scanner. The machine does not touch you. An x-ray tube rotates around your body to create images.
- It is **important** that you lie still.
- You may hear a **whirring or clicking sound** during the exam. You may be asked to hold your breath for short periods of time during the test.
- For some scans, you may receive a **contrast agent**. Contrast helps certain parts of the body show up more clearly on the images. Contrast may be given as a **liquid to drink, and / or an injection** given through an intravenous (IV) placed in your arm.
 - If contrast dye is used, you may feel a warm or flushed feeling through your body that will last for a few seconds.
- The **technician operates** the machine from a separate, nearby room to ensure safety, but can always hear you and can stop the test if you need assistance.
- The **test is painless** and usually takes 30 minutes, depending on the area(s) being scanned.
- CT scans use **low levels of radiation** to produce images. The amount of radiation is kept as low as possible and generally the benefits of the test outweigh the risk of radiation exposure. Talk to your provider if you have concerns about the test.
- ***IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN*** Tell your provider and the technologist if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant. The radiation used for the test may pose risks to a developing fetus. Your provider may delay the test or choose a safer alternative if appropriate.

MRI SCAN

- For most MRIs, you can **eat and drink normally**.
 - If you are scheduled for an abdominal or pelvic MRI, you may be asked to fast (not eat) for several hours prior to the scan.
- You may be asked to **change into a medical gown** and will be asked to remove jewelry or other items that could interfere with the test.
- You will lie on a table that slides into a **long tunnel shaped scanner**.
- It is important that you **lie still**.
- You will hear **loud tapping or thumping noises**. You may be offered earplugs or headphones for ear protection.
- Some MRIs may require a **contrast agent**.
- The **technician operates the machine** from a separate, nearby room to ensure safety, but can always hear you and can stop the test if you need assistance.
- The test is **painless** and usually lasts from 15 minutes to one hour, depending on the area(s) being scanned.
- Unlike CT scans, **MRIs do not use radiation**.
- If you experience **anxiety or claustrophobia**, let your provider know in advance. The scanner is an enclosed space, but many people feel more comfortable using techniques such as deep breathing, listening to music, or keeping their eyes closed during the exam. If your **anxiety is more severe**, your provider may recommend a mild sedative. Be sure to discuss this well ahead of your appointment so there is time to prescribe medication if needed. If you do take a sedative, you may need someone to drive you home after the scan.
- ***IMPORTANT*** Tell your provider and the technologist **if you have any metal in your body or an implanted device, such as a pacemaker or defibrillator (ICD)**. MRI uses a strong magnetic field which can affect or interfere with certain devices. Your care team will determine if MRI is safe for you, or if another test should be used instead.

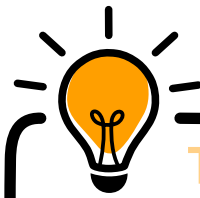


PET/CT SCAN

- You will be asked to **fast for 4-6 hours** before your appointment and drink only water.
 - Eating or drinking liquids other than water may affect the test results and could require you to repeat the scan on another day.
- If you have **diabetes**, you will receive specific instructions to prepare for this test.
- You may be asked to **change into a medical gown** and will be asked to remove jewelry or other items that could interfere with the test.
- You will receive a **small amount of radioactive tracer** through an IV in your arm. This helps to highlight areas of increased activity in the body. You will then wait 30 – 60 minutes to allow the tracer to circulate through your body.
- You will then **lie on the table** that moves slowly through the donut-shaped scanner.
- The machine **does not touch you**.
- It is important that you **lie still**.
- The **technologist operates** the machine from a separate, nearby room to ensure safety, but can always hear you and can stop the test if you need assistance.
- May be **combined with a CT scan** if both metabolic and structural information is needed.
- The **test is painless** and usually lasts 45 – 90 minutes, depending on the imaging required.
- ***IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN*** Tell your provider and technologist if you are pregnant or think you might be pregnant, or if you are breastfeeding.

AFTER YOUR SCAN

- You may need to **wait briefly** to confirm images are complete.
- If you have an **IV for the procedure**, it will be removed.
- If you **receive contrast**, it is important to drink plenty of water for the next 24 hours to help flush the contrast or radiotracer material out of your body.
- **Resume medications** as instructed (if applicable).
- Most people can **resume normal activities** immediately, and you can eat, drink, and drive right away.
- The **results of the scan** will be reviewed by a radiologist within a few days and will be sent to your provider for interpretation.
- Make sure you have a **follow-up with your oncology team** to discuss results and next steps.



TIP

If you are unsure about any instructions, contact your healthcare provider or the imaging facility before your appointment, as your test may be cancelled if instructions are not followed.

Under the 21st Century Cures Act, test results may appear in your patient portal before your provider reviews them. Results may include unfamiliar medical terms and can feel overwhelming or scary. It is **recommended you review results with your oncology team**, who can explain them in the context of your care. If urgent findings are identified, your provider will be notified directly.