What is a CT Scan?

CT is also called Computed Tomography or CAT Scan. It uses special x-ray equipment to obtain images of different tissues inside the body, such as soft tissue, bone and blood vessels, from different angles around the body. The image clarity allows radiologists to more easily diagnose problems, such as cancer, heart disease, infections, trauma, muscular and skeletal disorders. This exam involves little radiation exposure.

How do I prepare for the procedure?

You should wear comfortable, loose fitting clothing for you exam. Please avoid clothing with zippers and snaps because metal objects can affect the image. Depending on the body part being scanned, you may be asked to remove items like hairpins, jewelry, glasses, and hearing aids. Women should always inform their doctor or x-ray technologist if there is a possibility they are pregnant.

What does the CT scan look like?

The CT scanner is a large, square machine with a hole in the center like a doughnut. You will be asked to lie on the table which can move up or down and slide in and out of the hole. Inside the hole, an x-ray tube moves around the body producing images. As it does this it makes slight clicking and whirring noises. During the test the technologist will be able to see and speak with you from outside the room.

What to expect

A CT exam often requires the use of different contrast materials (x-ray dye) to see certain tissues, organs or blood vessels. Depending on the type of exam, the contrast will either be injected, swallowed or a combination of both. The technologist will ask some questions about your medical history before giving you any contrast material. After swallowing the oral contrast it takes approximately 45 minutes to be absorbed into the stomach, small bowel and colon. You may feel a warm sensation after dye has been injected into your arm. Flushing is normal and will only last a couple of minutes. The actual CT scan time usually takes 5-15 minutes depending on what exams are to be performed.

Who interprets the results and how do I get them?

A radiologist will analyze the images and provide your physician with his interpretation. Your personal physician will inform you of your results.