



What is computed tomography (CT)?

Computed tomography (CT, also known as a CAT scan) is a form of x-ray imaging that shows detailed cross sections or slices of internal structures such as bones, organs, and blood vessels.

How is CT different from standard x-rays?

Standard x-rays produce flat images of structures inside the body, like a photograph. With x-ray images, some structures or organs overlap each other, making details hard to see. Cross section images from CT show more detail.

What is CT usually used for?

CT is usually requested by doctors when patients have symptoms of a health problem and the doctor needs more information to diagnose the problem and make treatment decisions. In this case, the CT focuses on the specific area of the body that is related to the symptoms rather than screening the whole body.

What is whole body CT screening?

Whole body CT screening provides images of the whole body. It is done to look “all over” for illness or disease (just in case something might be wrong) instead of looking for a specific problem based on symptoms.

Is there evidence that whole body CT screening is useful or could save my life?

There is no scientific evidence showing that whole body CT screening is beneficial in identifying health problems.

Has the FDA approved CT screening for people with no symptoms?

The FDA has not approved CT or whole body CT for people who do not have symptoms of a disease. The FDA has also stated that there is no evidence that whole body CT is effective in detecting diseases early enough to treat, manage or cure them. You can find more information at: www.fda.gov/cdrh/ct/index.html.

Is there radiation exposure from CT?

Yes. CT uses higher amounts of radiation than standard x-ray imaging. For example, one CT of the head is estimated to have the same amount of radiation as 100 chest x-rays. The estimate for a CT of the abdomen is 500 chest x-rays. In whole body CT screening, the dose of radiation is much higher because more than one body area is screened.

If I have no symptoms but want whole body CT screening anyway, what are the risks?

- There is unnecessary radiation exposure with whole body CT screening. It is not clear at this time exactly which doses of radiation are harmful, but CT radiation may contribute to the risk of developing cancer later in life. When CT is needed to diagnose symptoms, the benefits can outweigh this potential risk. But if you do not have symptoms, this radiation exposure is not likely to provide a benefit and may be harmful.
- A CT image may be interpreted as abnormal when there is not actually a health problem that needs treatment. Further evaluation can lead to more unneeded testing and procedures. These additional tests and procedures have their own risks, such as further radiation exposure or toxicity from contrast material or medications. Any biopsy or surgery as a part of further evaluation may cause bleeding, infection or scarring.
- Test results that are interpreted as normal may also be harmful because they can provide you with a false sense of security, causing you to ignore symptoms that may develop later.

Is whole body CT screening recommended?

No. Most doctors and professional organizations like the American College of Radiology do not recommend whole body CT screening in patients who do not have symptoms.

Does Regence cover whole body CT screening?

No, it is considered “investigational” and is not covered. There is no evidence that whole body CT screening provides a benefit. In fact, it may lead to unnecessary radiation exposure and additional, unnecessary and costly follow-up tests. You can find the Regence Medical Policy at:

<http://blue.regence.com/trgmedpol/radiology/rad40.html>.

Is whole body CT screening expensive?

Yes. Whole body CT screening may cost more than \$1,000.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you have symptoms of a health problem, CT of a specific area of the body can provide valuable information to help your doctor diagnose the problem and make treatment decisions. **If you are healthy and have no symptoms**, whole body CT screening is costly and can be harmful.

Note: Regence physicians, nurses and pharmacists developed this summary to provide you with information about potential advantages and lack of advantages of CT screening. This summary was developed based upon an evaluation of information from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), scientific studies and input from practicing doctors and specialists.