

A GUIDE TO CT SCANS FOR FAMILIES OF KAISER HAYWARD/FREMONT PEDIATRICS

Your child's doctor has ordered a CT scan, and it is important that you understand what will happen. This is information about the CT scan and suggestions on how to prepare your child.

What is a CT (or CAT) scan?

CT stands for Computerized Tomography. CT scans use advanced x-ray technology to study different parts of the body. It provides very clear pictures of tissues, blood vessels, organs and bones. A computer processes the images and displays them on a monitor. Doctors may recommend a CT scan to diagnose certain conditions and plan for treatments.

How can I prepare my child for the CT scan? :

It is important to explain the CT scan to your child, using simple, developmentally appropriate language. When children understand their procedures, they are more likely to be less anxious and have successful outcomes. When and how to prepare your child for the CT scan depends on his or her age and the type of scan needed. Children are usually most concerned with what they will see and feel. It is helpful to describe what the CT scanner looks and sounds like.



The CT scanner is a large square machine with a round hole in the center. There is a bed that is connected to the CT scanner. At first, the scanner is quiet and then a loud “whirring” or buzzing sound is heard when it's scanning. In addition, a bright red light will flash on your child's face. The unusual sound and light might frighten your child, so your role is reassuring them. This is very important in obtaining an optimal CT.

If you need help in preparing your child for the CT scan, you may page Child Life Specialists, Jessica Claspill-Garcia, at (510) 784-2461 or Stephanie Costa, at (510) 784-4363. Child Life Specialists address the psychosocial, developmental and educational needs of children and their families in the hospital, and in outpatient settings. Child life specialists can provide procedure preparation, medical play, and procedure support to help decrease anxiety and increase coping in children.

- Please feel free to bring along a favorite toy that helps give comfort to your child.
- Help your child practice lying still before the scan. You can play a game like “freeze” and see how long your child can lie still.
- It is also a good idea to help your child practice holding his or her breath if that is going to be expected during the scan. You can count to five, and then 10, until your child is gradually able to do breath holds longer.
- Throughout the procedure, focus on the positive! You will be there for support & this can help the doctor figure out how to help your child.

Before the CT scan:

- Each CT scan is different, depending on which part of the body needs to be studied. Some children may need to drink a material called **contrast** before the scan. Contrast is a liquid that helps the doctor see the inside of the body more clearly.
- If your child has to drink contrast, they will not be able to eat for three or four hours before the test. You will be informed to arrive 1 to 1½ hours before the appointment. It may be a good idea to bring a clear liquid of your child's choice, such as apple juice or clear soda, to mix with the contrast so it will be easier for your child to drink.
- Your child should wear loose, comfortable clothing for the exam. You will be asked to remove any metal items that your child maybe wearing, such as jewelry or clothing with zippers, so that it does not interfere with the x-ray imaging.

What happens during the exam? :

- One parent or caregiver will be able to stay in the CT room with your child to provide support during the scan; however, women who are pregnant may not stay in the room. The person who stays with your child must wear a lead apron to avoid exposure to radiation.

- Children are encouraged to be as still as possible to get the clearest pictures. Your child will need to lie very still on a bed that is connected to the CT scanner. The CT technologist will help your child into a correct position for the scan. To prevent movement, a “seat belt”, or a piece of velcro may be placed over your child. Younger children may need to have their arms placed inside the “seat belt”.
 - If your child is having a head scan, a strap may be placed across their forehead and pads may be placed on the sides to help secure their head.
- Some children may need **IV (Into the Vein) contrast**. Contrast is a liquid that helps the doctor see the inside of the body more clearly. If your child needs IV contrast, tell them some kids say that when the IV is placed it feels like a pinch, or a sting, but the feeling goes away quickly. You can help your child find ways to cope so that this will be easier for him or her, such as taking deep breaths, counting, squeezing your hand or a stress ball, and having something else to focus on like a book or a toy. Your child may feel a warm sensation in his or her body, and may experience a metallic taste in their mouth which might last a few minutes.
- The CT technician will watch your child through a window while running the computer. They can hear and talk with you and your child.
- The bed will move into the center of the CT scanner for the pictures. It may move a short distance every few seconds to position your child for each new scan, or it may move continuously very slowly.
- Your child will not feel the x-rays and the CT scanner will not touch your child.
- Most scans require children to hold their breath (head scans do not require children to hold their breath). If your child is old enough and able to do so, a computerized voice will tell your child to hold his or her breath during the scan, usually for about 10 seconds at a time.
- The CT scan takes anywhere from 1-10 minutes, depending on the type of scan; however, plan to be at the appointment for at least 30 minutes for setting up and for the radiologist to review the pictures.

What happens if my child needs to be sedated for the CT scan?

You and your child’s doctor will discuss whether or not your child needs to be sedated for the CT scan. If it is decided that your child will not be able to hold still for the scan, then your child’s doctor will schedule a sedated CT. You will be instructed to call the Radiology Appointment Center to book an appointment for your child’s sedated CT scan:

Call (510) 675-2778 between the hours of 7:45am and 7:15pm, Monday-Friday.

You **must** attend a pre-sedation appointment with your child’s doctor within a week of the scheduled CT. You will be provided with information verbally and in writing about pre-sedation and sedation instructions. Please follow these instructions **carefully**.

- On the day of your child’s CT scan, you will arrive at Admitting **at least** 1 hour before the appointment. You and your child will then be taken to Outpatient Surgery where you will meet with the Hospital based Pediatrician to discuss your child’s sedated CT scan. Your child will have an IV placed and will receive the sedation medication. He or she will be transported to the CT room.
- Safety is a priority. Please leave your strollers and car seats in the car. There is limited space in the PACU (Recovery Room).
- When your child’s CT scan is finished, a nurse will accompany them to the PACU where they will be observed. He or she needs to be fully awake and alert enough to go home.
- There should be two caregivers present when your child is released from the hospital. One person to be next to your child, and one person to drive the car.

We want to make sure that you and your child have a good experience here and we hope that the information is helpful. If you have additional questions or concerns, please write them down and discuss them with your child’s doctor, radiology team, or child life specialist.