



**KAISER PERMANENTE®**

## CT Scan

A "CT scan" is the common name for a procedure called "computed tomography." A CAT scan is the same thing and is an abbreviation of "computerized axial tomography." This is a radiologic imaging technique that produces images of thin slices of the body, called cross sections, about a half-inch apart with the use of X-rays. It's the picture-taking equivalent of cutting a piece of fruit into several slices and looking inside at the cut surfaces. However, nobody gets cut; in fact, it's painless. For the specially trained physician who interprets these images, there is much more information than is available from regular X-rays.

CT scanning can't be used for everything, however, though many more medical problems can now be detected—and detected more quickly—with it. For example, CT scans are very good at finding bleeding or tumors in the brain, as well as many other problems elsewhere in the body. On the other hand, a CT scan is not the best test for detecting a heart attack or a finding a stomach ulcer.

Here's what happens when you have a CT scan. Before the test, you may be asked not to eat or you may be given a special medication to take or a liquid to drink. When you arrive at the clinic, you will lie down on a table, which is adjusted to different positions during the scan. The procedure takes up to an hour to complete. During that time, it's important to relax and lie as still as possible, so that the scan will make accurate pictures. The procedure is painless, although you may find it a bit uncomfortable to lie in one position during the test.

Sometimes it is necessary to inject a contrast liquid into a vein to make organs or blood vessels brighter in the pictures. This may produce a warm feeling throughout your body and a metallic taste in your mouth, but is usually harmless. A few people may be allergic to the contrast agent. If you have any allergies, kidney disease, or asthma, be sure to tell your doctor before you have the test. If you are allergic to iodine, you may be given medication before the test to prevent an allergic reaction.

As soon as the test is over, you can usually continue all your normal activities. The results will be studied and reported to your doctor within seven to ten days. If your doctor thinks that it's necessary, you may be asked to return for additional pictures, either by a CT scan or by X-rays. Your doctor may also want you to take a blood or urine test.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at [www.kaiserpermanente.org/california](http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/california), then

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- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION