

CT (CAT) Scan for Radiation Treatment Planning for the Spine and Extremities

This handout explains what you can expect during your CT scan. When you get to the Radiation Oncology department, please check in at the front desk.

A CT scan is a type of x-ray. While some CT scans are done to diagnose disease, the purpose of this scan is to plan your radiation treatments. Your doctor may or may not be there during the scan, but you will meet a radiation therapist. This may be the same person you see at your radiation treatments.



We will review your health records before your CT scan. If you are pregnant, or think you might be pregnant, please tell us before the scan. Your doctor may order a pregnancy test if you are of child-bearing age.

During Your Scan

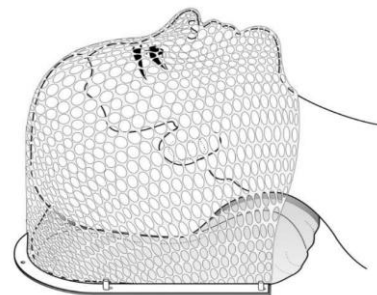
The entire visit will take about **30-60 minutes**. The scan itself takes only a few seconds. You may be asked to take off some of your clothes. We will keep you covered during the scan. Depending on where your disease is, you may be asked to lay on your back or stomach.

Once we are ready, you may lay on a narrow table in what we call a “mold.”

The mold feels like a beanbag at first. You will lay with your arms resting above your head. We may move you and the mold around.

You need to lay straight and flat. Once you are in position, a vacuum is used to create the shape of your body. When the vacuum starts you will hear a loud humming noise. The mold will start to form around you. This mold is unique to you. It will be used for each of your treatments.

If we are going to be treating near the head or neck, a mask may be needed. The face mask takes about 10-15 minutes to make. The mask is a flexible, mesh plastic that is placed in warm water. The mask will cover your head and face and will end below your chin. It will stretch as the radiation therapists form it around your face. You can see and breathe through the mask. **The mask will feel warm and wet, like a wet washcloth.** As it hardens you will feel the mask tighten slightly. It will not hurt, but you may notice it.



If you are uncomfortable at any point, please let us know. You will be lying in this same position for the whole treatment. You must be able to hold it for 15-30 minutes.

We may draw reference points on your skin to note your exact position and take pictures of your positioning for the record.

The table will move you in and out of the scanner several times. During the scan, you are alone in the room; but we can see and hear you at all times. You must lie still during the scan. If you need something, or have any problems during the scan, just speak up. We can hear you.

After Your Scan

The marks that were made on your skin before the scan may need to be made into small permanent tattoos. We will discuss this with you at your CT scan visit. If needed, you will get 4 permanent tattoos the size of a small freckle. They are made with a dot of ink and a quick needle poke.

Next Steps

Once your CT scan is done, your scan will be sent to your doctor. These images are used to plan yr radiation treatments. This will take a few days.

The radiation therapists will schedule your radiation treatments. Unless you and your doctor have made other plans, they will call you with your schedule within 5-10 business days. They will give you instructions on where to go and how to prepare for your treatment.

Who to Call

Please call the number below if you have any questions or concerns.

Radiation Oncology Clinic
(608) 915-1200

If you live outside of the Madison area, call **1-800-323-8942**. If the clinic is closed, your call will be transferred to our answering service. Ask to speak to the radiation oncology doctor on call. The doctor will call you back.

Patient Name: _____

Date of Appointment: _____

Time of Appointment: _____

Special Instructions: _____

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 7/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8046