TEST

Abdominal CT scan

An abdominal CT scan is an imaging test that uses X-rays and a computer to create detailed pictures of your abdomen, sometimes with contrast dye.

WHAT IT MEASURES
Structures and abnormalities in the abdomen

SAMPLE
None needed

FASTING NEEDED?
Sometimes, especially with oral contrast

USED FOR
Diagnosis and monitoring

MAIN LIMITATION
Can miss very small or early changes

Overview

An abdominal CT scan (also called a CT scan of the abdomen) is a test that creates detailed images of structures in your belly. CT stands for computed tomography .

CT uses X-rays (a form of radiation) and a computer to produce cross-sectional pictures. Depending on why you're getting the scan, you may receive contrast -a substance that helps certain tissues or organs show up more clearly.

This is a test, not a disease. It doesn't cause symptoms or predict your future by itself; what it shows depends on what is happening in your body.

How to prepare

Preparation depends on whether you'll have IV contrast , oral contrast , both, or neither.

Common instructions may include:

If you take diabetes medicines, especially blood sugar medications, tell the imaging team-handling of contrast can vary by person and by the specific test.

- Ask if you need to fast. Many centers ask you to avoid food for a short time before the scan, especially if oral contrast is used.
- Tell the team about medicines and allergies. Mention any past reactions to contrast dye and any serious allergies.
- Kidney health if IV contrast is planned. Some people need kidney function blood tests beforehand because contrast is processed by the kidneys in certain situations.
- Pregnancy status. Tell them if you are pregnant or might be pregnant, since CT uses X-rays.
- Remove metal items. You'll usually be asked to remove jewelry, belts, and other metal.

What happens during the test

You'll lie on a motorized table that slides into the CT scanner.

- Positioning: A technologist helps you lie still and may use straps or cushions.
- Breathing instructions: You may be asked to hold your breath briefly to reduce image blur.
- Contrast injection (if used): If IV contrast is part of your scan, an IV line is placed in a vein and contrast is injected during image capture.
- What you might feel: Some people feel warmth, a metallic taste, or mild nausea during injection; these usually pass quickly.
- Time: The scan is often relatively quick, but total visit time includes preparation.

Understanding your results

A radiologist (a doctor trained to read imaging) reviews the images and writes a report. You may see it through a patient portal or receive it through your clinician.

Reports often include:

If the report states "no acute findings," it usually means no major urgent-looking problem was seen. However, "normal" means no specific abnormality was visible at the time of scanning-it doesn't guarantee nothing is happening.

- Findings: What was seen and where it was seen
- Impression: A short summary of key points
- Incidental findings: Unexpected findings that may or may not require follow-up

Sources