

What is a Nuclear Medicine Scan?

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A nuclear medicine scan is a diagnostic test that gives your doctor information about organ function and / or anatomy. There are many different types of nuclear medicine scans. You will be given a very small amount of radioactive tracer material, either by pill, inhalation or injection, depending upon the specific exam. There will then be a waiting period after which you will lie under a camera and images will be obtained.

How should I prepare for the nuclear medicine scan?

- The tracer material is made precisely for the time of your exam, so it is **very important** that you be on time for your appointment.
- Your doctor will give you instructions about eating or taking medications prior to your exam.
- If you have diabetes, check with your doctor for specific instructions about eating and taking medications on the day of your exam.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing to the test.

- If you are claustrophobic or worried about lying still during the scan discuss this with your doctor ahead of time. He or she may order medication to help you to relax during the procedure.
- **For female patients, if there is any chance that you may be pregnant or if you are breast feeding, talk to your doctor before scheduling this exam.**

How is the nuclear medicine scan performed?

Before the scan, you will be given a small amount of radioactive tracer material, either by mouth, inhalation or injection. After distributing around your body, this tracer material can be seen throughout the body using special cameras and computers.

Depending upon the type of exam your doctor is ordering, you may come in first for the administration of the tracer, and then return later for the actual scan. Sometimes the entire procedure may be done during one visit. There are also some exams that require multiple visits in a day or over a few days.

When it is time to obtain the images with the camera, you will lie on an exam table. It is important to be able to lie still for

the study. The technologist will be with you during the exam, to assist in making you comfortable. Exam times vary from 5 minutes to approximately 2 hours depending upon what your doctor has ordered.

Is there a danger from the radioactive material used?

The smallest amount of radioactive material possible is used to perform the scan and it is short-lived, so exposure to radiation is limited.

For female patients, **if there is any possibility you may be pregnant or if you are breast feeding, it is important to tell this to the technologist before the procedure.**

Is there any special follow-up care after the nuclear medicine scan?

- Usually, there are not many restrictions following a nuclear medicine scan.
- For a short period of time after your test there may be a few restrictions for you to follow if you are caring for young children, or if you will be near pregnant women. The technologist will review any special instructions with you before you leave.
- For some exams, you will be encouraged to drink plenty of fluid (water or other non-alcoholic fluids) to help flush

out any extra tracer used for the test.

If you take medications to make you relax during the procedure, you must have a family member or friend available to drive you home.

Source: American College of Radiology. Retrieved 05/2007 from radiologyinfo.org

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