



## Answers to frequently asked questions about CT scans to help inform a discussion with your doctor

### A new technology could save your life.

Are you at risk of lung cancer? Check below for frequently asked questions on CT scans, a screening method that can detect lung cancer in an earlier, more treatable stage than a standard chest x-ray. For more information on CT scans, check with your doctor or visit [cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/noteworthy-trials/nlst/screeningcenters/screeningcenters](http://cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/noteworthy-trials/nlst/screeningcenters/screeningcenters).

### What is a CT scan?

A CT scan is an x-ray-based screening test that takes a full 360-degree view of different parts of the body and can be used to view inside the lungs. The CT scan is a noninvasive procedure that takes a cross-sectional picture, or a “slice,” of the body. CT scans can show the size, shape and location of organs, tissues — even tumors — within the body. A CT scan is more effective at finding early lung cancers than a simple chest x-ray, which provides only a single, flattened view of the chest. Because the scan is so sensitive, it’s more likely to detect smaller abnormalities in the lungs. Detecting lung cancer in the earliest stages provides better treatment outcomes.

### Does the scan hurt?

No. The scan only lasts a few seconds, and the imaging device is open on both ends, so you won’t have the added stress of a confined space.

### Does insurance cover the cost of the scan?

CT scans are not yet approved under most insurances as the study data is new. It takes time for insurance companies to evaluate the data and determine when they will begin to provide coverage for this test. However, a CT scan could be covered by insurance if the doctor says he/she suspects lung cancer or the person has any symptoms like a persistent cough. Contact your insurance provider, doctor or hospital for more information on when coverage will be available.

### Is CT screening right for me?

If you’re a current or former heavy smoker, it could be. Multiple studies demonstrate that CT scans are better at picking up lung cancer earlier. The data from a national screening trial found 20% fewer lung cancer deaths among heavy smokers ages 55 to 75 screened with CT scans compared to those screened with chest x-rays. The study was conducted in either current or former heavy smokers who had been smokers for 30 pack years (30 years at one pack per day or 15 years at two packs per day).



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### If the scan is negative, does that mean I can keep smoking?

No! Smoking does permanent damage to the lungs, so the increased risk of lung cancer never totally resolves. Tobacco smoke also injures many other parts of the body such as the heart. Even if your scan is negative for lung cancer at the time, quitting smoking is still the single best thing you can do to improve your health. As a smoker, your risk of death from heart attack or emphysema continues to increase even if your CT scan does not show lung cancer. The free quit plan at [BecomeAnEX.org](http://BecomeAnEX.org) can help you quit smoking by re-learning life without cigarettes.

### What happens if my scan is positive?

A CT scan cannot diagnose lung cancer, but it can show abnormalities that might be cancer. Positive scans are rare but they do occur. If your scan turns out to be positive, your doctor will talk to you about follow-up procedures, which may include follow-up scans or a biopsy.

### What are the risks?

The scan involves a low dose of radiation, similar to a mammogram or x-ray. Exposure to radiation, including x-rays and CT scans, can increase your risk of cancer in general, although this risk is low. Other risks could include the stress of having abnormalities detected and follow-up procedures associated with your CT scan, such as additional scans or biopsy.

### What are the benefits?

Treatment of lung cancer is most successful when cancer is found at an early stage, before it's had a chance to spread to other areas. Ultimately, your chances of being cured from lung cancer are much better when cancer is found early.

### What should I tell my doctor if I'm interested in the scan?

Since the results are new, some doctors may not yet know of the benefits of a CT scan or are waiting on verification of the final results. We encourage you to talk to your doctor about your smoking history and health issues, and they'll help determine if CT screening is right for you.

**While quitting smoking is the best way to prevent lung cancer, CT screening for lung cancer could reduce your risk of dying of cancer by catching it in an earlier, more treatable stage. If you are a current or former smoker and think you're at risk for lung cancer, speak to your doctor to learn more and to see if CT screening is right for you.**