CT Scan

What is a CT Scan?
A computed tomography (CT) is a special x-ray that is able to view your organs, bones, soft tissues and blood vessels in slices. This allows the radiologist to examine your body structures one slice at a time with great clarity. Images can even be combined to create a 3D image, providing much more detail than a normal x-ray. CT imaging can be used to detect cancer, conditions due to trauma, blood clots, infections, bone disorders, and other conditions. A CT scan, unlike an MRI, can be performed even if you have a pacemaker.

Why is it done?
CT imaging is used to diagnose a disorder or pinpoint the location of that disorder. CT scans may also be used to guide the placement of a needle during a biopsy procedure.

Patient preparation
Depending on the type of CT scan and your provider's orders, you may need to fast (no food or drink) prior to your scan. You may be asked to drink oral contrast (a barium mixture) several hours prior to your exam to highlight certain parts of your internal organs. Depending on the type of scan, you could be required to receive an injection of contrast material (x-ray dye) during your CT scan. You may be asked to wear a gown for your scan and remove all jewelry.

What to expect
A CT scan is a painless outpatient procedure and typically only takes a few minutes to complete. The machine is round like a doughnut with a table attached. You will lie on the table and slide through the "doughnut hole." Patients typically do not experience claustrophobia during a CT scan. You may be asked to hold your breath during certain parts of your exam for clearer images. It is very important to keep very still during the scan. You will be able to communicate with the technologist who is in a separate room via intercom the entire time. If you take a medication to manage diabetes which contains metformin and have an injection of contrast material for your CT, you will be given instructions to discontinue the diabetes medication after the CT and to contact the provider, who manages your diabetes for instructions for restarting the medication.

Risks
- Radiation exposure
- Harm to unborn baby (it is important to let your technologist know if you are or think you may be pregnant)
- Adverse reaction to contrast (it is very important to tell the technologist if you have had a contrast reaction in the past)

Report
A radiologist will read your scan and send the results to your health care provider. Your provider will go over your scan with you and discuss next steps.