A Patient’s Guide to Cardiac CT Imaging

Advances in technology... diagnosis you can trust.

With new advances in technology, it is possible to look at the beating heart and determine a person’s risk for heart disease.
What is a cardiac CT?
Cardiac CT is a test which uses CT (computed tomography) to scan your heart and coronary arteries. Cardiac CT is also called coronary CT angiograph or CCTA.

What does cardiac CT tell your doctor?
Cardiac CT is a test which produces pictures of your coronary arteries so that blockages or “hardening of the arteries” (plaque), which put you at risk for a heart attack, can be identified.

Can anyone get a cardiac CT?
Most people - but not all - are good candidates for this test. People who are not appropriate candidates are those:

- who have an irregular heart rate
- who are unable to lie flat for the test
- who are unable to hold their breath for at least 20-30 seconds
- who cannot be given a Beta-blocker - a medication which safely slows the heart rate down to produce better images
- with asthma who cannot have a beta-blocker
- who cannot be given intravenous iodinated “dye” (contrast) due to a prior reaction, damaged kidneys or inability to place an IV line

Does insurance cover the cost of a cardiac CT?
Some insurance carriers do not currently pay for a CCTA test. You and your doctor’s office should check with your insurance company to see if your insurance will cover the examination.
What is involved in a CCTA test?
The CCTA test is simple. There are 6 steps:

**Step 1: The test must be ordered by your doctor.**
- Your physician will determine if you should have the test.

**Step 2: Medication**
- You will take a beta-blocker pill about 1 hour before the test (usually in the Radiology department).
- Your heart rate is checked after 20 minutes - 1 hour.
- If your pulse rate is too fast after the pill, you will receive the beta blocker medication as an intravenous injection (IV) placed in your arm.

**Step 3: Intravenous (IV) line**
- An IV is placed into your arm, usually near the elbow.

**Step 4: Breath-holding instructions**
- You will be instructed how to hold your breath for the test.

**Step 5: Intravenous contrast**
- The IV “dye” or contrast is given through your IV line. You may have a warm feeling, flushing or a metallic taste in your mouth, but it will not last long.

**Step 6: Computer generation of images and interpretation**
- After you go home, physician processes the CT images, interprets the study and sends the report to your doctor.
What are the benefits of cardiac CT?

Cardiac CT is a safe and effective way to determine if you have plaque or blockages in your coronary arteries. Unlike cardiac catherization, cardiac CT is non-invasive and does NOT require placement of a cathether directly into the heart.

If you have any questions about this test, please contact your doctor or call CT scheduling at 203.688.4572