

Nuclear Medicine

A nuclear medicine scan is a specialized imaging procedure that is used to diagnose and evaluate many diseases. Some scans are used to detect and evaluate different types of cancers.



What to expect during your exam

The Procedure

Nuclear medicine uses small amounts of radiotracers and a special gamma camera to image the structure and function of organs within the body. Nuclear procedures can take from 30 minutes up to multiple days depending on the exam. For some procedures, such as a bone scan, the patient receives an injection of a radiotracer and returns 3 hours later for a 30-60 minute scan.

Positioning

You will lie on an examination table that slides between a camera above and a camera below you. For almost all procedures, a nurse or technologist will insert an intravenous (IV) catheter into a vein in your hand or arm. You will be asked to avoid movement while the camera is scanning.

Radiotracer

Nuclear medicine scans use radiotracer injections for imaging. Following the scan, the radiotracer will lose its radioactivity over time. Much of the radiotracer will pass through you naturally.

Contrast

You may be asked to drink some contrast material that will localize in the intestines and help the radiologist interpreting the exam.

How to prepare for your exam

Your specific exam prep will be provided at the time of scheduling and also sent to your email address on file. Your instructions depend on the type of nuclear scan ordered.

Eating

For some nuclear scans involving the gastrointestinal (GI) system, such as a HIDA scan, do not eat anything at least 4 hours prior to your exam. For many nuclear scans, there are no restrictions, and you may eat and drink.

Clothing

No jewelry. Comfortable clothing. You may be asked to change into a gown. Metal objects should be removed prior to your scan.

Medical

Do not exercise within 24 hours of your scheduled PET appointment.

Medication

Most medications do not interfere with nuclear scans and can be taken. For GI nuclear procedures, do not take any narcotics 4 hours prior to your exam.

Important things to mention to your technologist

Before your procedure, you may be asked to fill out a screening form asking about anything that might create a health risk or interfere with imaging. You may also undergo an interview to review your medical conditions.

Limitations

Recent illness, Allergies, Claustrophobia, Mobility, Weight, Cognitive functions, Any other disabilities.

Women

Possibility of pregnancy or breastfeeding

What to bring with you

Photo ID
Health insurance card
Prescription / referral or authorization paperwork

List of current medications
Previous images and reports

