

Nuclear Medicine Department

Information about your parathyroid scan

What is a parathyroid scan?

The parathyroid glands are small glands in the neck that produce hormones. There are four of these glands, which are usually located behind the thyroid gland. In rare cases, they may be found within the thyroid gland or in the chest. Parathyroid glands control the amount of calcium in the blood and within the bones.

A parathyroid scan is used to examine how your parathyroid glands are working. It can also identify parathyroid tissue away from its normal position in the neck. For this scan we will administer two different tracers, each containing a small amount of radioactivity. The tracers collect in the parathyroid glands and then we are able to take pictures of them on a scanner called a gamma camera.

Is there any preparation for my parathyroid scan?

- Please continue to eat and drink normally.
- Some types of medication interfere with the scan. If you have not already been contacted by the Nuclear Medicine Department, please ring the number at the end of this leaflet as soon as you get your appointment letter to tell us which medications you are currently taking. This includes over-the-counter medicines and vitamin D supplements. It may be necessary for you to stop taking some of them before the scan, and we will need to discuss this with the doctor looking after you.
- If you have had a CT scan or an x-ray procedure in the last six weeks during which you were given contrast media (x-ray dye), please telephone and let us know.
- Please allow plenty of time to get to your appointment, as the tracer is individually ordered for you and scans cannot normally be delayed.
- Please do not bring along anyone who is pregnant or under 18 years of age.
- You should expect the whole test to last for up to four hours.
- You must tell us in advance if you know you are (or think you may be) pregnant, or are breast feeding

What happens during my parathyroid scan?

Our staff will fully explain the procedure to you when you arrive for your appointment. Firstly a cannula (small tube) will be inserted into a vein in your arm or hand, and the first tracer will be injected through it. You will then be asked to wait for about 15 minutes before we start to take the pictures. Just before the scan begins you will be asked to empty your bladder.



You will not be asked to undress, but you will be required to remove anything metal from around your neck and chest area. We will then ask you to lie on the scan bed. We will make sure you are as comfortable as possible for the scan, as it is extremely important that you remain as still as you can, particularly your head and neck.

After a further 20 minutes you will be given a second injection through the cannula while still on the bed. After another 10 minutes we will take some more pictures, which will take about 30 minutes.

We will then remove the cannula and ask you to return later for more pictures. You may leave the department during this time, and eat and drink as normal.

You must attend for the later scan at the time given to you by the technologist.

When you return, you will again be asked to lie on the scan bed. We will take further pictures over the next hour. There are no further injections.

Will I feel anything during my scan?

There are no side effects from the injection. It will not make you feel sleepy or affect your ability to drive. Having the cannula inserted feels similar to having blood taken. Having the pictures taken will not hurt, but if you are in a lot of pain or find it difficult to keep still - please tell us.

What happens after my parathyroid scan?

Once we have checked the technical quality of your scan and are happy we have all the information we need, you will be able to leave the department.

Continue to drink plenty of fluid for the rest of the day and empty your bladder regularly. This helps wash out the tracer from your body more quickly. You may eat as normal.

A radiologist will report the scan and then the results will be sent to the consultant who referred you. The results are not available on the day.

How safe is the examination?

There are small risks associated with the radioactive tracer that you will be given. However the images give the doctors important information about your condition that helps in your treatment. The benefits of the information from the scan outweigh the small risks of exposure to radiation.

Following your injection, and for the rest of the day, you should try to avoid long periods of close contact with other people. This is to minimise their exposure to a small, and unnecessary dose of radiation

What are the benefits of my parathyroid scan?

This test also allows the doctors to see how well the glands are working, and to locate the position of the glands in your neck more accurately.

Because the parathyroid glands are small, it is difficult for them to be seen on other tests such as CT and ultrasound scanning. However an ultrasound scan of your thyroid and parathyroid glands is often performed in addition to the nuclear medicine scan as it gives additional information

What happens if I decide not to have the parathyroid scan?

If you decide not to have the parathyroid scan, please discuss this with the doctor looking after you.

What happens if I cannot keep my appointment?

If you cannot keep your appointment, contact the Nuclear Medicine Department straight away, so that we can offer the appointment slot to someone else.

Please attend promptly at the time shown on the attached appointment letter.

If you have any queries about this appointment, or any queries about the examination, please phone the number below:

0161 446 3942 or 3946

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact patient.information@christie.nhs.uk

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

