

## CT Calcium Score



### What is a Coronary CT Calcium Score?

A Coronary CT Calcium Score measures the amount of calcified, or hardened, plaque in the heart arteries. This is usually explained as a calcium score which supplies an assessment of the amount of plaque in the heart arteries. The greater amount of plaque you have, the higher the risk of heart attacks. Unlike a CT angiogram, a calcium score doesn't involve a dye.

### What are the risks of CT scans?

The radiation levels associated with CT calcium scoring is low, like the annual background radiation that people are exposed to over the course of a year. However, because of this radiation, they should only be carried out only when necessary.

### Why would you have a CT calcium score?

CT calcium scoring is sometimes used in patients without any symptoms related to their heart, to better understand their risk of having a heart attack and whether they need to take preventive medicines such as aspirin and statins to lower their risk of having heart problems. Usually, these decisions are made by assessing patients' risk factors. Sometimes this can be tricky, and a CT calcium score can help.

Patients without any symptoms of chest pain and a zero calcium have an extremely minimal risk of having a future heart attack. They may therefore not need to take preventive tablets such as aspirin or statins. Patients with no symptoms but a high calcium score are at higher risk of heart attacks in the future and so may benefit from these preventive medications. Currently this test is mainly used in private practices as a screening test.

Sometimes CT calcium scoring can be used in other conditions such as heart valve disease to assess how severe the disease is.

## What equipment do we use?

The CT scanner is like an ordinary X-ray machine, you will be asked to lie flat for your scan. The main difference is that on the CT machine you will be passed through a wide ring. Most patients have no difficulty with this.



## What are the benefits of having a Coronary CT Calcium Score?

The CT calcium score takes five minutes to perform and interpret.

The aim of the Coronary CT Calcium Score is to assess further the likelihood that you have coronary heart disease.

A low score is useful because it shows that you are unlikely to have coronary heart disease.

A higher score does not mean that you do have coronary heart disease, you may go on to have a CT Coronary Angiogram or in some cases, if the doctor thinks it is more appropriate, you will have a coronary angiogram.

## Who should not have a CT scan?

CT scans expose you to radiation, so they are not suitable for pregnant women.

## Preparing for your scan:

Please do not eat anything for four hours before your appointment.

Two hours before your appointment please drink at least one pint (500mls) of water.

Do not drink tea or coffee on the day of your appointment.

Patients who take Viagra should not take it for 24hours before their scan.