

# The PET Centre

at St Thomas' Hospital and  
the Cancer Centre at Guy's

Your guide to having a PET-CT scan



## **What is a PET-CT scan?**

PET-CT (positron emission tomography coupled with computed tomography), is a safe and easy scanning method.

It shows us how the tissues in the body are functioning and helps us to identify organs or tissues that are not working normally. With PET-CT, we inject a tracer (often a weak radioactive form of sugar) then scan the body. The tracer shows up on the scan. Using this method we can get important information about many conditions affecting different parts of the body, which will help your doctor to plan appropriate treatment for you.

## **Do I need to confirm my appointment?**

Yes. It is very important that you call us to confirm your appointment. It is also important that you allow plenty of time to get to the PET Centre, as scans generally cannot be delayed.

You must tell us in advance if you know you are pregnant (or think that you may be), are breastfeeding, or are the main carer of small children. We may need to give you additional information.

## **Can I eat or drink before my scan?**

You will be asked not to eat and to drink plain water only. Please check your

appointment letter carefully as it contains important information about not eating before your scan. If you have diabetes, please contact us on 020 7188 4988 for further information.

## **How long will the scan take?**

This will depend on the type of scan, but you should expect to be in the department for two to three hours. Typically you will spend about 30 minutes in the scanner.

## **Can I bring someone with me?**

If you wish, a relative or friend may accompany you and wait in the waiting room. It is very important that you do not bring children or pregnant women to accompany you to the department.

## **What should I wear?**

We suggest that you wear something warm, loose and comfortable. As part of the examination includes a CT scan, it is important that you are not wearing any metal – including jewellery, watches, zips, and bra hooks – during the scan, as this may interfere with the scan. A hospital gown will be provided.

## **What will happen during the scan?**

This will depend on the type of scan, and will be fully explained to you by our staff when you arrive. We will insert a small needle into a vein in your arm, hand, or occasionally foot (if

we cannot use an arm vein). We then inject the tracer. If you are having a brain or body scan we will ask you to relax quietly for 30-90 minutes before we take you to the scanner room.

We will ask you to lie on the scanner bed where we will make you as comfortable as possible. You will need to keep very still during the scan. It is important that you do not move, or the pictures could be blurred and the scan may have to be repeated. Once you are positioned correctly, the scanner bed will move gently and slide you into the centre of the scanner until the part of the body to be scanned is correctly positioned.

## **Will I feel anything?**

The scan should be completely painless. The most difficult part is keeping still. Make sure you are as comfortable as possible before we start and try to relax.

## **Can I bring something to pass the time?**

You will be able to read or listen to music while you are relaxing quietly before your scan (unless you are having a brain scan). Once you are in the scanner we can play music for you via the internet or you may bring your own iPod, MP3 player or smartphone.

## What side effects are there?

Your scan involves injecting you with a radioactive tracer, which will only remain in your body for a few hours. This gives you a small amount of radiation. Any small risk from the radiation is outweighed by the benefits of performing the scan to help in your diagnosis and management. There are no significant side effects. Occasionally when performing body or heart scans we may need to give you other drugs and, if this is the case, we will discuss the possible minor side effects with you.

## When will my results be available?

We will send the results to the doctor who requested the scan, usually within 48 hours of the scan being completed. If results are needed more urgently your doctor can ask us to email them. If you have a further appointment with your doctor please let us know the date when you attend for your scan.

## Your scan is at:

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**Please refer to your appointment letter to ensure you attend the appropriate scanning site**

**w:** [www.sthpetcentre.org.uk](http://www.sthpetcentre.org.uk)

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your PET-CT scan, please contact us on 020 7188 4988 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) or visit our website: [www.sthpetcentre.org.uk](http://www.sthpetcentre.org.uk)

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

## Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

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