

Medical Imaging

CT Cardiac Calcium Score

What is it?

This non-invasive test uses a CT scan to measure the amount of calcified plaque in your coronary arteries. The test measures your calcium score, which helps your doctor calculate your risk of developing coronary artery disease-related events such as a heart attack or stroke.

Studies have found that if you have no plaque you might be able to get off statin medication for several years.

Are there any risks to this procedure?

The CT scanner emits about the same radiation as an x-ray machine for 10 x-rays. For this reason, a doctor's written order is required.

What happens during this scan?

When you arrive for the procedure, you will be asked to remove clothing above the waist and to wear a medical gown. You will also need to remove jewelry around your neck or near your chest. In order to make things easier for yourself, you can consider leaving jewelry at home and wearing clothes that are easy to change.

Dye or Contrast is not required for the heart scan. So no IVs, shots or drinking of contrast.



During the heart scan, you will lie on your back on a table that slowly moves your whole body, except for your head, into the CT scanner (a hollow tube). Usually, the procedure takes 10–15 minutes.

Results

The result of the test is usually given as a number called an Agatston score. The score represents a combination of information that reflects the total area of calcium deposits and the density of the calcium. A score of zero means no calcium is present in the heart and suggests a low likelihood to develop a heart attack in the future. When calcium is present, the higher the score, the higher the risk of attacks in the long term. A score of 100 to 300 - moderate plaque deposition - is associated with a relatively high risk of heart attack or other heart disease over the next three to five years. A score greater than 300 indicates very high to severe disease and heart attack risk.

You also may receive a percentile score, which indicates your amount of calcium relative to people of the same age and sex.