

Q & A

CORONARY CT ANGIOGRAPHY

WHITE - WILSON MEDICAL CENTER is always concerned about early detection and treatment of heart disease to prevent devastating or life-altering cardiac events. We are excited to offer Coronary CT Angiography, the newest development in cardiac screening technology which utilizes an ultra-fast, 16 images per second CT (Computed Tomography) scanner, the most advanced and accurate technology available.

What is Computed Tomography?

Computed Tomography (CT) is one of the safest and most reliable examination methods available. CT works with an X-ray system that rotates around you, taking cross-section pictures of your body. These pictures are then converted by a computer into a complete picture, making a precise exam possible. CT can detect even the most minor changes early on. Additionally, a high-speed CT scanner allows us to look at parts of the body in a 3-dimensional format and to “see” what is happening inside the body’s organs and tissues.

What is Coronary CT Angiography?

Coronary CT Angiography (CCTA) is an examination that uses CT technology to visualize blood flow in coronary arteries, the blood vessels that feed the heart muscle, as well as the great vessels going to and coming from the heart. By visualizing the coronary arteries, doctors are able to determine if there is plaque present which can put you at risk for having a heart attack. This plaque formation is part of the disease process known as atherosclerosis.

What makes CCTA special?

CCTA can pick up signs of atherosclerosis that would not show up on EKG or possibly even a stress test. White-Wilson Medical Center is pleased to be able to offer the very latest in CT technology. Coronary CTA is a procedure so advanced that only a handful of medical practices are equipped with the knowledge, technology and expertise to provide it.

How does it work?

Coronary CTA provides much of the same information that a conventional cardiac catheterization does, but with reduced risks. It is, however, not as precise. You will be given an injection of contrast (an iodine-based, radio-opaque liquid that shows up on x-ray) in the vein of your arm. Risks of bleeding or blood clot are greatly reduced by not having to puncture an artery for the injection. The CT scan is completed in less than a minute by the high-speed capability of this newest technology. That means that you will not have to lie flat for long periods of time like you would for a conventional cardiac catheterization.

What is the process to get scheduled for a CCTA?

Your doctor may refer you for a CCTA test, or you may take advantage of this cutting-edge technology to screen yourself for coronary artery disease. Please call the Cardio-Pulmonary Department in advance at 850.863.8185 to talk with a nurse who will review your medical history, medication, allergies and laboratory results. It may be necessary to obtain previous medical records if you have had any coronary procedures done in the past. You will be given instructions about any necessary preparations prior to coming in for your CCTA.

What happens on the day of the exam?

You will arrive about an hour before your CCTA appointment in order to complete the necessary preparations. First, you will need to sign a consent form, then a nurse will take a brief assessment of your heart rate and blood pressure. An intravenous catheter (IV) will be inserted to administer the injection of contrast before the test. If your heart rate is greater than 70 beats per minute (BPM), you may be injected with a beta-blocker, a quick-acting medication to lower it. A slower heart rate produces images that are much more clear and precise. Once your heart rate is within the desirable range, you will be escorted to the Radiology Department for the scan.

The radiology technologists will administer the injection of contrast, after which you may experience a feeling of heat for a few seconds. They will position you on the scanning table and expertly guide you through the examination, instructing you to hold your breath while the high-speed scan is taking place. Once the technicians are confident that the scans are complete, they will remove the IV catheter. You will be released shortly after the exam is completed.

How do I learn about the results?

Your CCTA results will be forwarded to your medical doctor, who can discuss the results with you. If you are self-referred, you will receive the results and have the opportunity to meet with Cheri Penas, the Cardiology Nurse Practitioner, who will review the results with you and discuss risk factors and steps that you may need to take based upon the results.

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Cardiac Imaging Group
& Preventive Cardiology