

CT Scans for Minor Head Injuries

You have been diagnosed with a minor head injury. This type of injury is unlikely to involve a condition that requires a CT scan for diagnosis, such as a fractured (broken) skull or bleeding in the brain. A CT scan is unlikely to give your doctor useful information.

Each CT scan gives you a large dose of ionizing radiation. In some cases, it's equal to the dose from about 200 chest x-rays. Radiation can damage your cells' genetic material. Your body most often repairs that damage. When it doesn't, this damage can lead to cancer. Radiation from CT scans is particularly harmful to children in the long term, because they have many years of life left to possibly develop cancer. While the risk from a single CT scan is very low, it is better not to get a CT scan unless you need one, in order to limit your lifetime radiation dose.

Most head injuries don't require a CT scan. Even if you briefly passed out, a CT scan is not indicated unless you have symptoms and exam findings concerning for a major head injury. Mild headache, dizziness, fatigue, irritability, and difficulty concentrating are possible after a minor head injury (post-concussion syndrome). However, it is important that you seek re-evaluation by a healthcare provider if you experience any of the following:

- Changes in mental state or alertness
- Throwing up again and again
- Very bad headache that starts suddenly or rapidly worsens
- Signs of a stroke such as trouble seeing, severe dizziness, weakness or numbness of your face, arm, or leg, especially if only on one side of your body.