DaTscan™: Frequently Asked Questions

What Is DaTscan Imaging?

DaTscan takes detailed pictures of the brain, focusing on the cells that produce the chemical dopamine. The loss of dopamine cells underlies the movement symptoms of Parkinson's disease (PD). With DaTscan, researchers can determine if these cells are reduced. But Parkinson's is not the only disease that affects the dopamine cells. By itself, DaTscan can't diagnose Parkinson's, but it can help confirm a doctor's diagnosis.

How Does DaTscan Work?

For a DaTscan, you will be given a small amount of a radioactive drug, or tracer, which tags the dopamine cells in your brain. A specialized camera detects this substance and takes images of your brain to show the location and density of dopamine cells.

What Is the Difference between DaTscan and MRI?

Both take images of the brain. However, DaTscan provides more detailed pictures of dopamine brain cells.

How Is DaTscan Used for Research?

Researchers can use the detailed pictures of dopamine cells to better understand brain changes associated with PD. DaTscan also can verify that control volunteers (those without PD) do not have any changes in the dopamine system. Scientists can then compare the brain images of people with PD and control volunteers. DaTscan also is being studied as a possible Parkinson's biomarker — an objective measure to diagnose and track disease.

Does DaTscan Cause Side Effects?

Potential side effects associated with DaTscan include headache, nausea, upset stomach, sensation of motion, dry mouth and dizziness. Less than one percent of people who have undergone DaTscan reported having side effects.

Will I Be Exposed to Radiation during DaTscan?

The drug administered prior to DaTscan contains a small amount of radiation. The level of radiation exposure is similar to other common procedures, such as an x-ray.

Will I Be Notified about My DaTscan Results?

The DaTscan information will be used for research purposes. Study personnel will contact you if your DaTscan results require further consultation.