Frequently Asked Questions:

What advantages do PET/CT scans offer over other imaging technologies, such as Computed Tomography (CT) or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans?

Unlike CT or MRI scans, PET scans can measure metabolic changes occurring in tissues at the cellular level. This gives PET an advantage in determining whether lesions in the body are benign or malignant, minimizing the need for surgical biopsies. In addition, PET can detect diseases at earlier stages. CT or MRI usually cannot detect abnormalities until diseases cause structural changes in organs or tissues. Our state-of-the-art PET/CT fusion scanner precisely localizes and discriminates disease better than PET or CT alone. We also have the ability to fuse PET scans with other studies such as radiation planning CT and brain MRI, to further improve the detection and localization of disease.

How should a patient prepare for a PET/CT scan?

We perform PET/CT scans on an outpatient basis, and our office provides patients with detailed instructions on how to prepare for the exam. Strenuous activity should be avoided the day prior to the study as excessive muscular activity may interfere with the interpretation of the scan. Patients are asked not to eat or drink anything for a minimum of six hours before their appointment. They should inform their doctors of any medications or ongoing medical conditions, particularly diabetes and related medications. Patients should wear warm, comfortable clothing that is metal free and may be asked to wear hospital gowns during a PET/CT.

What should a patient expect during the procedure?

The procedure begins with the intravenous injection of a radiotracer. Once the radiotracer is injected, it takes about 1-1/2 hours for the body to absorb it. Next, the patient lies down on a flat imaging table that is moved to the center of the PET/CT scanner. The machine detects and records the signals from the radiotracer. This process can take another 20 to 30 minutes. A computer is used to convert the signals into three-dimensional images that physicians can look at to detect any problems.

What are the risks involved in getting a PET/CT scan?

The risks involved with PET scans are minimal, with the benefits often far outweighing the risks. In fact, PET scans can eliminate the need for exploratory tests and help individuals avoid potentially expensive and invasive surgeries later. During PET/CT scans, patients are exposed to radioactive material, but in very low doses that do not affect normal bodily functions. Pregnant or breastfeeding women may expose their fetuses or infants to radiation through PET/CT and should discuss the risks and benefits with their doctors before having the tests performed.

Is it difficult to get insurance approval for a PET/CT?

Covered indications for PET/CT are tabulated on the next page.

When a patient calls to make an appointment for a scan, our office will contact the insurance carrier for approval. If necessary, our office will contact the physician's office if any additional information is required for approval. Indications that are covered with evidence development require the physician to fill out a pre-scan questionnaire (5 questions) and a post-scan questionnaire (5 questions) regarding the role of PET/CT in the particular patient's care.