

## SPECT Scan

A SPECT scan is a type of CT scan in short, except it produces 3D images and involves a radioactive tracer being injected into you. Mine was requested on the basis of evaluating my bones, to show up any severe degeneration, damage etc.

You are generally requested to arrive in the morning so a cannula can be inserted and the tracer can go straight in. After it has been injected you are requested to drink at least 2 litres of fluids; I had hot chocolate, juice and loads of water - the aim isn't to fill your bladder, so you can empty it. The aim is to get the tracer absorbed around your body as fast as possible, so even though it was injected into your bloodstream, fluids aid that process. The radiologist will let you know when your slot with the scanner is whilst they are injecting you. I do however recommend you keep the nearest facilities in mind though, because all the fluid intake will catch up with you.

They say there are no side effects to the tracer; I will mention I got a headache but I was in a lot of pain courtesy of the ongoing pain flare up and from the lack of sleep mixed with travelling. I went for a long walk during my wait as a distraction then eventually went back to the hospital. The radiologist was very kind, he let me empty my bladder before I got on the scanning table, if he hadn't there is no way I would have made it through the first part of the scan.

The SPECT doesn't emit radiation like CTs so you can be accompanied whilst you lie there. The machine is much like a CT scanner, except it also has two plates that adjust towards you. If you ever thought an MRI was close, a SPECT takes it to a new level - that 15cm gap is reduced to about 0.5cm. I was offered a blanket, which after five minutes in, I wish I had accepted, because lying still with air conditioning blasting down on you, does get cold. You can remain fully clothed, minus metal but they will put a band around your wrists so your arms are level. The scan itself is painless and surprisingly noiseless, if you are lucky you may even get to watch part of it on a moveable screen - very interesting.

First the scanner scans your entire body, flagging up any areas of concern, it takes about 25 minutes I think. At some point you will end up mostly inside the scanner but you can barely feel the movement. Fortunately you can empty your bladder again when that part is finished! The second part is when the plates rotate around your body for the 3D image build up, it may not be a claustrophobic's dream so if you are - do tell your radiographer. After that, any guests have to leave whilst an actual CT is done and then after that it is done you can go empty your bladder again.

- A warning is given that whilst you are full of tracer, you are radioactive, so to stay away from pregnant ladies and young children.

The images will be checked before you leave to ensure nothing has to be repeated, then it is over and you can continue emptying your bladder as needed. It is greatly advised that you drink a further two litres of fluids to encourage the tracer out of your system, but after running back and forth from the nearest toilets, whilst drinking more fluids may not seem very appealing - I recommend you do. The report takes about 10 working days to come through.