

# The Full-Body Scan Industry

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**(CBS)** A new study shows that using whole-body CT scans to screen for disease are becoming more accessible to American consumers without the need for a doctor's referral or prescription. But the jury is still out on whether the benefits outweigh the risks.

**Dr. Emily Senay** explained on *The Early Show* that the CT scan, or CAT scan, is an advanced screening technology that uses radiation to provide a detailed look inside the body.

She says as the technology has become widespread, new businesses across the country are offering anybody with enough money a scan of the whole body for signs of disease. The detailed images can enable the detection of diseases such as cancer or heart disease much earlier and more accurate in many cases.

But, Senay says when you take the doctor out of the equation, the question of who should get the scan remains unanswered. And researchers point out in the *Journal Radiology* the need for patient guidelines to help them decide when and how often to get these scans.

A whole-body CT scan may seem like a good health-minded idea, but the results may give a very mixed message, according to Senay. The services are persuasively marketing the scans as a way for people to take control of their own healthcare, and suggest the possibility of discovering potentially lifesaving information in a person who appears healthy. But there are risks.

Exposure to radiation from the scans is much higher than an x-ray. And, if a scan produce results of unknown significance, it could lead to unnecessary invasive tests and psychological trauma from worrying about the results, according to Senay.

And the scans are expensive — from \$800 to \$1,200 per scan. They are not usually covered by insurance without a doctor's referral.

Senay says there's no question that there's a potential benefit for detecting disease, but there is still no scientific evidence of the benefits of generalized screening.

The scan may turn out to help people with a family history of certain diseases such as heart disease or cancer, says Senay, but a study is still needed to compare people who have and haven't had that type of early screening.

The researchers identified the rapid growth of direct-to-consumer scanning businesses nationwide. There are 88 scanning businesses today. Last year 40 centers were counted in the U.S. Right now, the imaging centers are found mainly on the east and west coasts in affluent areas. But, Senay says, the researchers worry that the practice will become a mainstream practice before the science catches up.