Is a Full-Body MRI Your Ultimate Health Ally — Or an Anxiety Trap?

Full-body scans like Prenuvo can spot potential health issues early — but experts question whether the benefits outweigh the risk of “scanxiety.”

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When actress Busy Philipps recently decided to book an elective, full-body MRI scan through Prenuvo, she had no idea it would save her life. Despite having zero symptoms and reassurance from her primary care doctor that it wasn't necessary, the 47-year-old trusted her gut.

Her screening uncovered a shocking discovery: a 2.6-centimeter brain tumor nestled in her right frontal lobe, later diagnosed as a rare grade 2 oligodendroglioma. The early detection allowed neurosurgeons to successfully remove the mass before major symptoms could manifest.

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A whole-body scan might *sound* like something out of a sci-fi movie, but companies like Prenuvo are betting that this kind of proactive screening is the future of healthcare. Since launching in 2018, the company has completed more than 170,000 scans.

Traditional medical imaging is usually only ordered for a reason: a doctor has a concern, a patient has symptoms or something needs a closer look. A whole-body scan instead takes a very different approach, scanning multiple areas of the body at once in a simple yet thorough MRI setting to spot potential red flags early.

According to Prenuvo's data, one in 20 scans result in potentially life-saving findings, including cancers (some as early as stage 1), aneurysms, liver disease, multiple sclerosis, spinal conditions and internal abnormalities that may otherwise go unnoticed such as endometriosis or fibroids.

At first glance, more information *sounds* like a good thing. But if we're already tracking steps, heart rate, sleep, and workouts (hello, Apple Watch and Oura Ring), what happens to our already overwhelmed psyches when we get a detailed map of *everything* going on inside of our bodies? For some, it's a mindset reset that helps them take control of their health realities. For others, it might fuel an already anxious vibe, cleverly known to some as "scanxiety."

The Case for Empowerment During Midlife

In defense of proactive women, particularly those navigating midlife, having

more information about what's happening in their bodies can feel incredibly validating. Women have spent decades feeling dismissed or not taken seriously in medical settings. Being armed with objective data can make them feel more confident when asking questions, pushing for answers, and advocating for themselves.

"It can give women a real sense of empowerment and control over their health," says Laurie Groh, MS, LPC, a licensed counselor and owner of Shoreside Therapies in Milwaukee. "So much about our health can feel outside of our control. Historically, many women have felt a disconnect between what they feel in their bodies and what they're told is real. Having more information can make a woman feel more informed and involved."

Lilian M. Raji, communications advisor at The Lilian Raji Agency, made the deeply personal decision to get a Prenuvo scan in her late 40s in December 2024. Raji's mother had been diagnosed with colon cancer a mere six months before she passed away, despite her constant health complaints dismissed by her doctor.

"Had we had access to Prenuvo," Raji says, "she could have challenged her doctor and stopped the spread before it reached stage 4."

When Raji received her own scan results, the data brought massive clarity. The images revealed uterine fibroids, which finally explained 37 years of brutally heavy periods. "I always prefer knowing to not knowing," she says, "particularly when early detection allows me to make lifestyle changes to slow down or stop potential problems altogether."

When Information Becomes an Obsession

Unless you have actual symptoms to explain, major medical groups strongly caution against elective full-body screening scans, citing their high rate of false alarms can lead to emotional stress, health anxiety and unnecessary follow-up procedures. The American College of Radiology has spoken out in the past against people without symptoms getting the full-body MRIs, and in a *Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA)* editorial, experts outline the downsides of these increasingly popular scans.

"Someone with health anxiety may be constantly worried about whether their doctor is missing something, misinterpreting findings or if it could get significantly worse," explains Doriel Jacov, JD, LCSW, a somatic psychotherapist in New York City, noting that an ambiguous or incidental finding can completely hijack a patient's peace of mind, even if doctors aren't concerned.

How to Approach the Scan With a Healthy Mindset

If you *do* decide to get a scan, how you approach the results matters as much as what the scan finds.

"The worst-case scenario runs through everyone's minds when do something like this. My emotions were high, as was my anxiety," says Adrienne Eckert, 48, who had the scan to accomplish a baseline before her upcoming milestone birthday. She was nervous about what the scan might find, but in the end she approached it calmly and was granted a clean bill of health.

Groh recommends booking a scan out of raw curiosity rather than a frantic search for safety.

“There’s no way to be certain about anything in our life, body or health,” she advises. “A healthy mindset is about using that knowledge to feel more solid in our bodies and our patterns, not expecting total health security or certainty. If you’re doing it primarily to reduce anxiety, this won’t solve that problem.”

She also emphasizes that because incidental findings can trigger worry, you absolutely need a provider who can help you contextualize the results, so you don’t panic over normal variations.

“For some people, these devices help them feel more in control of their health and help them make better decisions. Paying attention to ourselves, like anything we do for ourselves, needs balance for it to be useful,” Groh continues.

“Being proactive about health can create a sense of agency and empowerment,” agrees Jacov. “These scans can provide useful information to discuss with medical providers in order to make informed health decisions. At the same time, it’s important to differentiate between agency and control. Agency involves taking an active role in improving health, hoping that it will improve outcomes. Complete control over what happens to our bodies, however, is impossible.”

A full body scan like Prenuvo is a detailed snapshot of what’s happening inside your body at one particular moment. The trick is knowing what to do with that information once you have it. Gathering your personal health data should never come with a peace of mind price tag.

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