

Full-Body Scans Are Touted as Early Cancer Detectors, but Are They Worth the Hype?

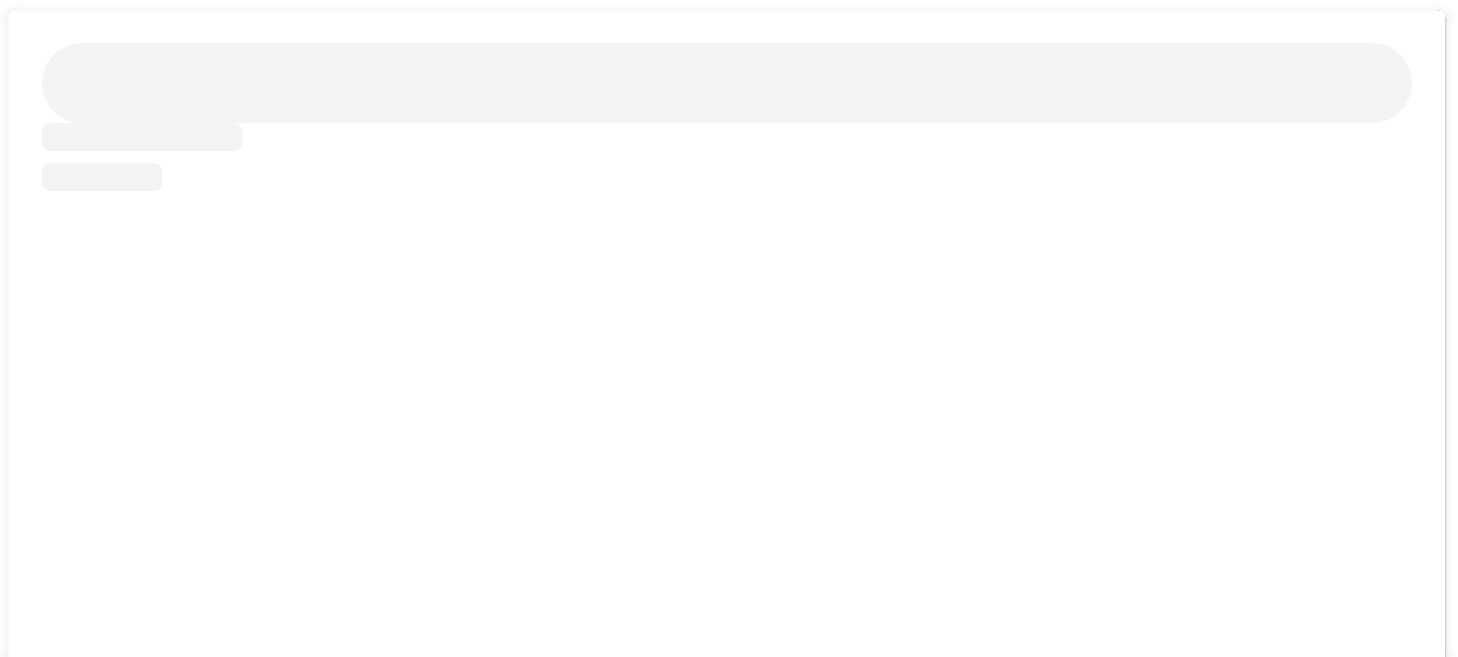
Kim Kardashian calls Penuvo's \$2,500 full-body MRI scans a "lifesaving machine." Is that true—and is it worth the cost?

November 15, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

Silicon Valley-based Penuvo charges \$2,500 for full-body [magnetic resonance imaging](#) scans that the company claims can detect more than 500 health conditions early, including cancer, brain aneurysms and multiple sclerosis. As the celebrity-backed scans gain momentum on social media, health experts ask whether the scans are worth the cost and for whom.

Penuvo is not yet covered by insurers, forcing patients to pay out of pocket. However, various celebrities have endorsed the company, which plans to open 11 additional locations by 2024, just six years after its inception, according to a [CNBC article](#).

In August, Kim Kardashian referred to Penuvo as a "lifesaving machine" in an [Instagram post](#) that garnered more than 3.4 million likes. However, many people pointed out how inaccessible the scan is to the average person. In addition to cost, there is a long waiting list. In fact, the next available appointment for a full-body scan in New York is in March, according to CNBC.





[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Kim Kardashian (@kimkardashian)

The primary appeal of Penuvo's custom MRI machines is speed. The machines can scan a person's entire body in about an hour. What's more, images from the scan are reviewed immediately by one of the company's 30 licensed radiologists, and patients typically receive results within five to 10 business days, according to CNBC.

Many of the online stories promoting full-body scanning technology stress the health benefits of diagnosing diseases early, when they are easier to treat. But overtesting can be dangerous. MRIs can also pick up benign abnormalities or yield false positives, as STAT News reports, which can cause unwarranted stress.

Saurabh Jha, a radiologist at Penn Medicine, told STAT that there's no medical reason for healthy people to get a full-body scan. "If I put my physician cap on, then I realize that this is all just humbug, bordering on quackery," Jha said. "But then I have another cap, which is sort of a libertarian cap, which is that people can do whatever the hell they want with their organs and their money."

Penuvo received approval from the Food and Drug Administration in 2018 and is one of several other companies, such as Ezra, Meko Health and SimonMed, that offer elective full-body imaging.

Penuvo CEO Andrew Lacy said awareness about the company has grown exponentially in the past year. "These days, when people ask me what I do, and I say I work at Penuvo, it's 'Oh, I heard that on this podcast,' or 'That influencer talked about it,'" he told CNBC.

Lacy said that Penuvo is working to [reduce prices](#) through "old-fashioned scaling" and [artificial intelligence](#), which may also reduce the amount of time people spend in the machines.

Currently, Prenuvo offers a torso scan for \$1,000 or a scan of the head and torso for \$1,800.

Lacy said some companies, especially those with self-funded insurance plans, include Prenuvo scans as a perk for employees.

“Over time, that data helps inform insurance companies about whether this should be something that would be covered across the insurance plans that they offer,” Lacy said.

Prenuvo is still a relatively young company. Medical experts emphasize that full-body MRI scans are not guaranteed to detect everything and are not meant to replace routine targeted screenings such as [mammograms](#) or [colonoscopies](#).

Kimberly Amrami, MD, vice chair of the department of radiology at Mayo Clinic Rochester, told CNBC that patients must manage their expectations. For example, identifying lesions in the lungs can be difficult and scanning body parts such as the knee, pelvis, breasts and prostate require different techniques.

Esther Dyson, an early investor in Ezra, told STAT News that she was initially hesitant about a technology that’s mostly available to the rich. But as companies cater more to the uninsured and underinsured and if the technology becomes more accessible, then others will be able to meet their screening needs, especially if they’re having symptoms. But only time, and more data, will tell.

To read more, click [#MRI](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Despite Katie Couric’s Advice, Doctors Say Ultrasound Breast Exams May Not Be Needed](#),” “[New Prostate Cancer Scan Locates Cancer Cells Hidden with Standard Imaging](#)” and “[Safer Ways to Detect Recurrence of Testicular Cancer](#).”