



# For Patients

## *A Guide to Incidental Findings*

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Primary findings are the results your clinicians (doctors, nurses, or technicians) are looking for when they conduct tests. Incidental findings are results that they discover, even though they were not looking for them. The Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues (Bioethics Commission) released a report that helps clinicians manage these incidental findings. This guide helps you understand what those findings might be, and what questions you should ask during your visit to prepare for them.

### What tests might have incidental findings?

#### *Genetic testing:*

Clinicians might order genetic testing during your visit. They might discover something in your DNA that they did not expect.

#### *Tests on your blood or urine:*

Clinicians might order blood or urine tests. While a clinician might order the test for a specific purpose, labs often conduct many tests in a bundle. As a result, clinicians might discover something they were not looking for.

#### *Imaging:*

Clinicians might order a medical imaging test, such as an X-ray, MRI, or ultrasound. Since the image sometimes covers a large area, it might show something that clinicians were not looking for.

### What questions should I ask my clinician?

#### *What might you find?*

Ask your clinicians to explain the tests they are doing, and what results they might discover.

#### *What will you tell me?*

Ask your clinicians which results they will tell you about, and which they will not. This will help you understand what you might learn from the test.

#### *What will happen next?*

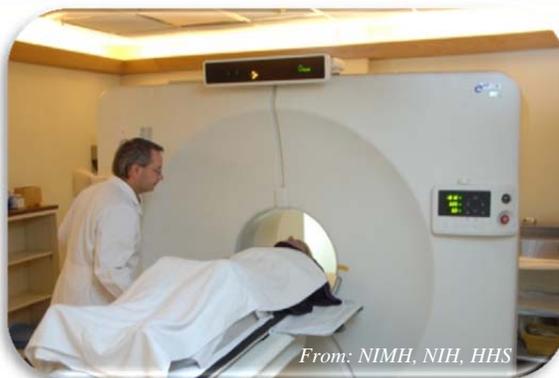
Ask your clinicians how they will follow up on the results they find. Sometimes no action is best. Sometimes you will need treatment right away, and other times your clinician will have to do more testing. You and your clinician can make a decision together about what steps to take.

#### *What if I don't want to know?*

Make sure to tell your clinician if there are any results you don't want to know about. You and your clinician should have a conversation about what each of you feels comfortable with.

### PATIENT EXPERIENCES

Roger had a seizure, so his doctors scanned his brain. The doctors found a small mass in Roger's brain, even though this wasn't what they were looking for. They told him he could have surgery to remove it, or just watch and wait. Roger chose to watch and wait.



*From: NIMH, NIH, HHS*

Janae went to her local emergency room after hitting her head. The doctor was concerned that she might have internal injuries, or a brain injury. The doctor scanned her brain, and found that everything was normal.