

Extravasation within the radiology or radiotherapy department

You have been given an intravenous (IV) contrast media (dye) into a vein to help provide clearer images for your radiology/radiotherapy scan. Occasionally contrast media leak into the surrounding tissue, causing discomfort. This information sheet explains what extravasation is and how we manage it.

What is extravasation?

Extravasation is when medicine or contrast media has leaked outside of the vein into the surrounding tissue. You may have noticed an aching pain, stinging, swelling, or skin changes where the cannula (small plastic tube) was placed. The radiographer or nurse may have noticed changes in the flow rate during the administration of the contrast media, or the radiographer or nurse may have observed or felt that the contrast media wasn't flowing in easily.

Why is extravasation a problem?

If extravasation goes untreated, it can lead to discomfort and aching stiffness in the limb where the contrast media or medicine extravasated, or rarely, tissue damage.

What treatment is given to prevent tissue damage?

The radiographers or nurses stop giving the contrast media or medicine as soon as the extravasation is noticed. We then remove the cannula from the vein and press/massage the affected area. After this, we apply a cold pack to the area for 15 minutes, elevate the limb, and monitor the swelling. Before you leave the department, you will be seen by a doctor, radiology doctor or an advanced nurse practitioner, who will examine the area.

What do I need to do?

- Gently exercise and massage the affected limb.
- If there are symptoms and swelling; elevate the affected limb above the level of the heart and apply a cold compress (ice pack or frozen vegetables wrapped in a clean towel) 3 or 4 times per day for no longer than 15 minutes at a time. Never place ice directly on the skin as this may cause frostbite.

You also need to look at the area several times every day to make sure the treatment has worked. Check for the following:

- Has the area changed colour or increased in redness?
- Is the area blistering, peeling or flaking?



- Is the area uncomfortable or painful?
- Has the area remained swollen or is the limb increasing in size?
- Is there any numbness, tingling or altered sensation in the limb?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions above or if you have any other concerns, please contact us.

The Royal Marsden Hotline: 020 8915 6899

(available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

