Contrast Extravasation

When contrast material leaks outside the vein

What is a contrast extravasation?

During your computed tomography (CT) scan or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, you were given contrast material through an intravenous (IV) line. Contrast is a dye that makes your veins and arteries show up clearly on the scan.

For some tests, the contrast must be injected very quickly. But the faster it is given, the greater the chance of a contrast extravasation. A contrast extravasation occurs when contrast material leaks into the fatty tissue around a vein.

Extravasation happens in 1 out of every 250 to 500 procedures. The contrast injections can be stopped if an extravasation occurs.

The best way to prevent extravasation is to have good access to your vein from the IV. When you had a CT scan, a staff member stayed with you so that any extravasation could be detected early. Even with good IV access and a staff member watching, extravasations still happen.

How was my extravasation treated?

We asked you to elevate your arm and we applied pressure to your IV site. An ice pack was used to help limit pain.

How do I treat my extravasation site at home?

After you leave the Radiology Department, follow these steps:

1. Apply ice to the affected areas for 20 minutes every hour for the next 24 hours, while you are awake. Wrap the ice in a clean towel or cloth. Do not put the ice directly on your skin.

2. After the first 24 hours, apply warm compresses for comfort.

3. If you continue to have pain, discomfort, or swelling after the first week, ask your primary health care provider to check your extravasation site.
When to Call the Doctor

Rarely, more treatment is needed. Call the doctor if:

- You have pain that does not go away.
- There is swelling or redness at the IV site.
- Your skin at the IV site is an odd color.
- You have redness that goes up your arm.

Other Instructions

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