



Contrast Extravasation

Contrast outside the vein in the fatty tissue

This handout explains what a contrast extravasation is and how it is treated.

What is a contrast extravasation?

Sometimes, during a computed tomography scan (CT scan) or magnetic resonance imaging scan (MRI), you are given contrast through your vein (also called an IV). Contrast is a dye that allows your veins and arteries to show up more clearly on the CT/MRI scan.

For timing purposes, the injections of contrast may be done quite fast. The faster the contrast is given, the greater the chance of a *contrast extravasation*. A contrast extravasation is a leakage of contrast material into the fatty tissue around a vein. Extravasation happens in one out of every 250 to 500 procedures.

The most practical approach to prevent extravasation is to have good IV access. In CT, a staff member will stay with you so that extravasation can be detected early and the injections can be stopped, if needed. However, even with good IV access and this precaution, extravasations still happen.

How is contrast extravasation treated?

While you are at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC), we ask you to elevate your arm and apply a compress to the IV site. An ice pack also helps to limit any pain you may have – both while you are at the medical center and over the next few days.

After you leave the Radiology Department, follow these steps:

1. Apply ice to the affected areas for 20 minutes per hour for the next 24 hours, while you are awake.
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, have the extravasation site checked by your regular doctor.

