

Information sheet for patients who have had an intravenous injection of contrast medium for MRI scan

Other formats

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You have been given an injection of Gadolinium (contrast medium) into a vein to enhance your MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan. A contrast medium is commonly described as a 'dye' which allows veins, arteries and internal organs to show up more clearly on scan images. Although it is described as a 'dye', it is actually colourless and removed naturally from your body through your bladder when you go to the toilet. The contrast medium used for MRI scans is Gadolinium.

You might like to drink plenty of fluid after your examination to flush the Gadolinium out of your system.

If you have had an injection of MRI contrast medium during your procedure, you are required to remain in the department for 30 minutes after the injection, and not to leave the hospital or drive for an hour following the procedure.

What are the possible effects from receiving an injection of Gadolinium?

Gadolinium may cause an allergic reaction. The most common allergic reactions are:

- headaches
- nausea and vomiting
- sneezing, wheezing or runny nose
- eye irritation
- itching, hives or skin rash
- swelling of the face, mouth, hands, feet or throat
- difficulty in breathing
- low blood pressure

In the radiology department, it is normal practice for a member of staff to go through a checklist with you before the Gadolinium is given so that any conditions you have which might cause a potential reaction to it can be identified. However, even when no conditions are identified, it is still possible that a reaction may occur in people.

Any reaction to Gadolinium is normally immediate, but occasionally a red, itchy rash can develop on the body some hours after the scan. This is very rare, but if it does happen, you should contact your GP or local A&E department.

Other rare but possible delayed reactions include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, dizziness, and headache.

These signs and symptoms almost always disappear within a few hours and usually little or no treatment is required.

However, if problems persist or you have any concerns, you should contact your GP or nearest A&E department.

Are there any other possible effects from Gadolinium?

In some circumstances, Gadolinium has to be injected into the arm quite quickly. Sometimes it can leak into the fatty tissue around the vein during the injection. This is called Extravasation.

Extravasation happens very rarely, but if it does occur, the area of your arm around the injection site may feel sore and swollen. The staff will explain to you if this has happened and you will be advised to:

- keep gently massaging the area
- keep your arm raised up (if possible) and apply a cold compress

The swelling should clear within 24 hours.

Follow up

If you continue to have pain, discomfort or swelling around the injection site up to one week after your examination and you are concerned, you should get the injection site checked by your GP.

In rare cases, further treatment of the site is needed. Symptoms to watch for are:

- ongoing pain
- swelling
- discoloration
- redness, including redness that goes up your arm

If problems persist, you should contact your local GP or nearest A&E department.

References

MEDSCAPE Contrast Medium Reactions

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PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

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'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

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