

Extravasation and Infiltration

Information for patients



What are extravasations and infiltrations?

Extravasation is when a solution or drug which can cause damage to tissues has leaked outside of the vein into the surrounding tissues. Some anti-cancer treatments are called vesicant drugs and they are known to cause damage if they leak out of the vein. Some anti-cancer drugs are called irritant drugs and if they leak outside the vein it is called infiltration.

You may have noticed pain, stinging, swelling or other changes to the skin at the site of the cannula or the nurse may have noticed that the drug isn't flowing into the vein easily.

Why did this happen?

We don't know why the drug has leaked into the tissues although we know it can happen sometimes when giving chemotherapy. It is not possible to totally prevent this happening even though we take lots of precautions to reduce the risk. The important thing is that it has been detected and treated.

Why is extravasation a problem?

If extravasation goes untreated it can lead to pain, stiffness and tissue damage.

What treatment have I received to prevent this tissue damage?

The nurse has given you the recommended treatment for the drug which has leaked. Treatment depends on the degree of injury and which drug is involved. It may have involved injections into the tissue or applying a medication to the area.

This means the chance of on-going problems is reduced. You need to keep looking at the area every day to make sure the treatment has worked and follow the advice provided.

The nurse may have arranged for a photograph to be taken of the site of injury. This is so the medical team can assess your response to the extravasation treatment. It may also be necessary to refer you to the plastic surgeons for a surgical procedure to wash out the chemotherapy from the affected area or for further monitoring and treatment.

What do I need to do?

1. Gently exercise the affected arm or hand. Take mild painkillers if you need to.
2. Elevate the limb if possible.
3. Only apply lotions/creams to the affected area which have been recommended by the chemotherapy team. Do not use soap on the affected area. After washing dry gently with a clean towel.
4. Avoid tight clothing around the affected area.
5. Do not expose the affected area to sunlight.
6. Look at the area at least twice a day.
 - Has the area changed colour or increased in redness?
 - Is the area blistering, peeling or flaking?
 - Is the area more uncomfortable?
 - Is the pain making it difficult for you to exercise the arm or hand?
7. You may need to apply a medication to the area or apply heat or cold. The nurse will explain what you need to do.

When should I contact you?

If you answered **Yes** to any of the questions in **section six** highlighted on the previous page, or if you have any other concerns then you should contact the hospital.

Who do I contact?

You must contact someone at this hospital who is used to dealing with extravasation.

- If it is within the hours of 8.00am - 6.30pm, Monday - Friday contact the ward or unit where you had your treatment administered.
- If it is between 7pm and 8am Monday to Friday, or any time over a weekend or bank holiday, please phone the oncology patient enquiries blepholder via the hospital switchboard on **0113 243 3433**.

Please follow the instructions below

Tick if applicable	Instructions	Reasons
<input type="checkbox"/>	Elevate affected arm as much as possible for the first 24 hours and gently exercise the hand regularly	Helps to reduce the swelling
<input type="checkbox"/>	Apply a hot water bottle/heat pad for 30 minutes every four hours, for the first 24 hours. Make sure it is not too hot. Avoid direct contact with affected skin. Use with caution to prevent burns/scalds.	This may help to disperse the drug and reduce swelling and irritation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Apply a cold pack for 30 minutes every two hours, for the next 24 hours except when asleep. Avoid direct skin contact/use dry gauze between skin and the cold source. Use carefully to avoid cold burns	This may help to neutralise the drug and reduce tissue swelling and irritation
Start immediately <input type="checkbox"/> Delay for 8-12 hours <input type="checkbox"/>	For the first 24 hours apply DMSO to the extravasation site with a cotton bud every two hours. Avoid unaffected skin. After 24 hours - every three hours you must alternately apply hydrocortisone cream or DMSO. Continue to apply alternating product every three hours for seven days except when asleep. Stop DMSO if a blister forms and contact the hospital for advice.	This helps to remove the drug that has leaked into the tissue
<input type="checkbox"/>	Apply a thin layer of hydrocortisone cream to the affected area four times a day for the next seven days or as long as the area is red.	This may help to reduce inflammation

What happens next?

Before you are discharged you will either be given an appointment to attend the hospital for review, or a nurse will contact you the day after the extravasation injury to see how the area looks and feels. Further monitoring will be arranged if required.

You need to attend

Date: Time:

You will be contacted by phone

Date: Time:



What did you think of your care?

Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/nhsleedsfft

Your views matter



The printing of this leaflet has been
funded by Leeds Hospitals Charity
leedshospitalscharity.org.uk

leeds hospitalscharity

charity number: 1170369

© Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust 2013 • 1st edition Ver 1
Developed by Sarah Waite, Sister, Oncology Day Case Unit
Design by Medical Illustration Services • 20210211_011/NR

LN004407
Publication date
07/2021
Review date
07/2023