

Chemotherapy and the risk of extravasation

Cancer Service

Patient Information Leaflet

This leaflet contains important information about your treatment. Please read it and ask us if you have any queries.

Introduction

This booklet has been written to provide information to patients receiving intravenous chemotherapy about the risk of extravasation. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you, the doctor and the nursing team treating you, but it helps you to understand more about what is discussed.

What is extravasation?

Extravasation is the term used to describe the leakage of a drug out of the vein into the surrounding tissue which can occur during the administration of chemotherapy or other intravenous drugs. These are drugs given through a cannula into a vein. A cannula is a small, plastic device entering the vein, through which fluids and drugs can be given.

The risk of extravasation is very low. It can happen to between one to four people out of every 10 people receiving intravenous chemotherapy.

What causes extravasation?

The exact cause is not always clear but we know some people are more at risk than others. These include:

- Elderly, confused or agitated people
- People with fragile veins or certain diseases
- People with a low platelet count (platelets are cells in the blood which help to stop bleeding)
- People who have already had a lot of chemotherapy treatment through their veins
- Children
- Movement of the cannula (small plastic tube situated in a vein) through which treatment is given

What are the symptoms?

You may notice redness, inflammation or irritation, warmth, pain, stinging or swelling at, or near, the site where the drug enters the vein. Fortunately, more severe symptoms are very rare. However, these can range from superficial tissue/skin reaction, inflammation and blistering of the nearby skin to damage to the underlying tissue and structures, such as muscle and tendons.

If you think that you may have an extravasation injury, it is important that you tell your nurse immediately.

How is it diagnosed?

Extravasation can be difficult to diagnose as some drugs can make veins feel sore without causing lasting damage and other drugs can cause temporary redness or flare around the treatment site.

If during the process of being given your treatment, you feel a change in the sensation or anything different in the way the drugs are going into the vein, please tell the chemotherapy staff immediately. It is important to let us know how you really feel so that we can act quickly.

If extravasation is confirmed or suspected as having occurred, we will ask you to look at the area once a day to assess whether:

- The area has changed in colour or increased in redness
- The area is blistering, peeling or flaking
- The area is more uncomfortable or tight
- The pain is making it difficult for you to exercise the arm or hand

If the answer is 'yes' to any of the above symptoms, please tell your nurse immediately; or contact us on one of the numbers in this leaflet or on your yellow Chemotherapy Appointment card if you have gone home.

You will be assessed by a specialist nurse, doctor and/or pharmacist who will decide what action needs to be taken. You will also be asked for your consent to take a digital image (photograph) of the affected area so that we can monitor your progress. This will be retained in your hospital notes.

You will also be asked to return to the unit for a specialist doctor or nurse to examine the affected area, the next working day after the extravasation injury.

How is it treated?

The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust has a clear policy on the management of extravasation and the treatment required for the different drugs used. All staff working on the chemotherapy unit receive regular training on extravasation recognition and management.

If you experience extravasation, you may be asked to continue some treatment when you go home. The doctor or nurse will advise you on what you need to do. This can involve applying a cream to the area (depending on which drug has leaked), applying a warm or cold pack to the affected area, keeping the affected arm raised where possible, gently exercising the affected arm or hand and taking painkillers if needed.

The treatment for extravasation can also make the affected area uncomfortable. You might need to apply cream or ointment; hot or cold packs and take painkillers for a while afterwards.

On rare occasions, plastic surgery may be required in the affected area. In this case, the Plastic Surgery team will contact you.

Can it be prevented?

We can reduce the risk by careful choice of the type of cannula used (this is a small device entering the vein, through which fluids and drugs can be given) and where it is placed in the hand or arm. The possibility of extravasation occurring cannot be completely prevented, and is a known side effect of intravenous treatment.

This is why it is important that you let staff know immediately of any change in the sensation around the cannula whilst the treatment is being given. Prompt action can reduce the damage and discomfort of extravasation. However unfortunately, even with prompt action, certain drugs can cause painful tissue damage. Some patients may need to see a plastic surgeon for assessment.

You can help to reduce your risk of getting extravasation by wearing loose fitting clothing when you attend for treatment. This will help to reduce the amount of movement to your hand and arm if you need to use the toilet, and will also reduce the risk of pulling on your cannula or drip.

Can I find out more?

You can call for more information as follows:

C4 Georgina Day Case Unit on:

01384 456111 ext. 2454/2028 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)

Ward C4 Georgina Unit (at all other times) on:

01384 244235 or 01384 244258

Who do I contact if I have any concerns?

If you notice any changes to your skin or experience any pain, redness or swelling around the area that your cannula was placed, please contact these numbers for advice immediately:

C4 Georgina Day Case Unit on:

01384 456111 ext. 2454/2028 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)

Ward C4 Georgina Unit (at all other times) on:

01384 244235 or 01384 244258

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/oncology/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

للحصول على هذه النشرة بحجم أكبر، وعلى شكل إصدار صوتي و بلغات أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال بالرقم 08000730510.

此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

ਇਹ ਪਰਚਾ ਵੱਡੇ ਅੱਖਰਾਂ, ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਰੀਕਾਰਡ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਸਰੀਆਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾਵਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ, 0800 073 0510 ਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜੀ।

Aceasta broșura poate fi pusă la dispoziție tipărită cu caractere mari, versiune audio sau în alte limbi, pentru acest lucru vă rugăm sunați la 0800 073 0510.

یہ کتابچہ آپ کو بڑے حروف کی لکھائی، سمعی صورت اور دیگر زبانوں میں مہیا کیا جا سکتا ہے۔ براہ کرم مہربانی فون نمبر 08000730510 پر رابطہ کریں۔