

UW Medicine



Fred Hutch
Cancer Center



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Contrast Injections

When you have imaging tests

This handout explains contrast injections and what risks are involved.

What is a contrast injection?

You are scheduled for an imaging test that uses a substance called *contrast*. For this test, contrast may be injected into a vein in your arm.

Contrast looks white on X-ray, *computed tomography* (CT), and *magnetic resonance* (MR) images. This makes it easier to see the part of your body we are studying.

Other names for contrast are contrast medium, contrast agent, contrast material, X-ray dye, and *gadolinium* contrast.

What risks are involved?

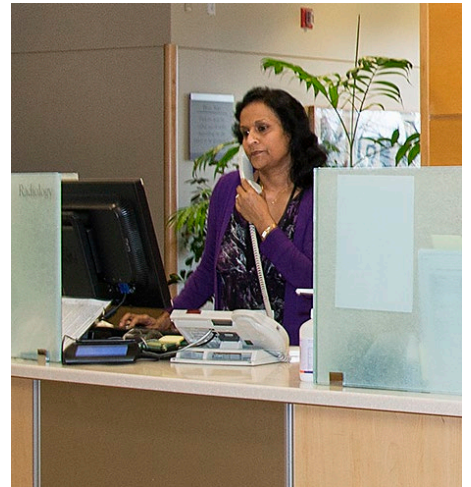
Contrast is usually very safe. But, there are small risks from any injection. Risks include:

- Injury to a nerve, artery, or vein
- Infection
- Allergic reaction to the contrast

When people have an allergic reaction to contrast, they may start sneezing or get hives. One person out of 1,000 has a more serious reaction to contrast.

Our staff are trained to treat these reactions. Very rarely (in 1 out of 170,000 patients), death has occurred after a contrast injection.

People who already have kidney problems or some other health concerns are at risk of kidney injury from the contrast. We are very careful about giving contrast to people who are on dialysis.



Radiology staff can help with any questions or concerns you may have.

You have a higher risk for a problem from the contrast if you have:

- Ever had a moderate or severe allergic reaction to contrast
- Strong allergies to foods or drugs
- Unstable asthma that currently needs treatment
- Severe heart disease
- Multiple myeloma, sickle cell disease, or polycythemia
- Severe kidney disease, especially if it is caused by diabetes
- Kidney problems and are on dialysis

If one or more of these is true for you, please tell your technologist or radiologist. We will plan your test to lower the chance of a problem.

How can I learn more?

If you have any questions about contrast injections, please ask your imaging technologist or radiologist.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Radiology/Imaging Services Departments:

- UWMC - Montlake:
206.598.6200
- UWMC - Northwest:
206.668.1744
- Harborview Medical Center
(HMC): 206.774.3105
- Fred Hutchinson Cancer
Center: 206.606.1434