

UW Medicine



Delayed Reaction to IV Contrast

Follow-up and self-care

This handout gives instructions to follow if you have a delayed reaction after receiving contrast (X-ray dye) through a vein during an imaging study.

What is IV contrast?

Contrast is a dye that may be given before imaging studies such as computed tomography (CT) scans, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, or angiography exams (X-rays of blood or lymph vessels).

Contrast helps veins, arteries, some organs, and other body tissues show up more clearly on the images. Contrast injected into a vein is called *IV contrast*.

What should I do after an IV contrast study?

After having an injection of contrast, drink extra fluids to help your body flush the contrast from your system. Drink 2 or 3 extra glasses of water in the first 4 hours after your scan.



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What is a contrast reaction?

A *contrast reaction* is an allergic reaction to the contrast. These reactions do not happen very often, but they can range from mild to life-threatening.

Symptoms of contrast reaction include:

- Sneezing
- Hives or an itchy feeling
- Tightness in your throat, or having a hard time breathing (*anaphylaxis*)

These reactions may occur right after the contrast is injected or several hours later, after you have left the clinic or medical center.

Do I need treatment for mild symptoms?

If you have **any** reaction at all, you must seek treatment:

- See a healthcare professional **right away**. Do not ignore any sign of a reaction, even if it seems mild.
- If the reaction occurs **after** you have left the clinic or medical center, see below.
- You may need medicine to treat your reaction or to keep it from getting worse.

What if my symptoms occur after I leave the clinic or medical center?

If you feel you are having a reaction after you leave the clinic or medical center, and your symptoms are:

- **Mild** (you feel itchy or you are sneezing, or both):
 - Call the phone number for your facility, listed in the “Questions” box on this page. Ask to speak with a radiologist.
 - Explain that you recently had an IV contrast study and what symptoms you are having. The radiologist will tell you what to do next.
- **More severe** (if you are having a hard time breathing or have tightness in your throat):
 - Go to the nearest Emergency Department **right away**.

Questions?

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

- UW Medical Center
Imaging Services:
206.598.6200
- UW Medical Center
Roosevelt Clinic
Radiology:
206.598.6868
- Harborview Medical
Center Imaging Services:
206.744.3105
- Seattle Cancer Care
Alliance: 206.288.7200