

What You Need to Know About an Extravasation

This handout offers information on an extravasation and how you can manage it. It is important you and your care partner understand this information.

Extravasation is what happens when a systemic therapy treatment medication or intravenous (IV) contrast (dye) leaks out from your vein and gets trapped under your skin. If an extravasation happens to you, it may injure the tissue below your skin. It can cause pain, swelling, bruising, sores and irritation to an area of your skin (the affected area). The severity of these symptoms and what it means for you will depend on the medication you were given.

Your healthcare team will give you the information and support you need during the treatment of an extravasation.

What you can do to care for the affected area of your skin:

1. Your healthcare team will tell you what kind of compress to use to decrease swelling and pain (discomfort). This is decided based on the medication you were given.

☐ **A cold compress**

You may use any of the following as a cold compress:

- Frozen vegetable bag wrapped in a damp, clean face cloth or towel
- Ice in a sealable bag, wrapped in a damp, clean face cloth or towel
- A cold compress or ice pack wrapped in a clean face cloth or towel

Put a cold compress on the affected area 4 times a day for 15 minutes each time. You need to do this for 24 to 48 hours while you are awake.

☐ **A warm compress**

You may use any of the following as a warm compress:

- A clean face cloth or towel that is damp with warm water
You will need to dampen the face cloth or towel with warm water when it cools down to room temperature.
- A warm compress or pack wrapped in a clean face cloth or towel

Put a warm compress on the affected area 4 times a day for 15 minutes each time. You need to do this for 24 to 48 hours while you are awake.

2. For 48 hours after your extravasation happens, put a pillow under your affected arm and hand to support it. You need to do this when you are sitting or lying down. This will help decrease swelling.

3. You may shower. After you shower, use a clean towel to gently pat the affected area dry. Do not rub this area. You may take a bath if you keep the affected area out of the water.

It is important for you to protect the affected area while it heals.

Do not:

- Put lotion, cream, or ointment on this area of your skin (unless your healthcare team tells you to).
- Expose this area of your skin to sunlight.
- Expose this area of your skin to very hot or very cold temperatures.
- Wear tight clothing over this area of your skin.

When to call a nurse at the cancer centre

Call to talk to a nurse at the cancer centre if you have any of these symptoms:

- Increased pain in the affected area
- Redness along your vein
- Blisters and peeling of your skin in the affected area

Your nurse will have given you the number to call between the hours of 8:30 am and 4 pm from Monday to Friday. The cancer centre is closed on weekends and holidays. After these hours, go to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to you.

Go to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to you if you have:

- A fever above 38.3° C/100.9°F at any time or above 38.0° C/100.4°F for more than an hour
- Any new feeling of numbness or tingling in the fingers of your affected arm

Take this handout with you and show it to the doctor and nurse in the Emergency Department. **It is important** to tell them the name of the systemic therapy treatment medication used in your treatment or if you had IV contrast.

Talk to a member of your healthcare team if you have questions or do not understand any of the information in this handout.

This handout was created by the Patient Education Program at the Durham Regional Cancer Centre/Lakeridge Health. It was last reviewed in April 2026.