

Gadolinium-based Contrast: Most Commonly Asked Questions

Important

In December 2017, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued the following warning about gadolinium-based contrast given by intravenous (IV) injection:

Gadolinium-based contrast may stay in your body (brain, bone, skin and other organs) for months to years after having an IV injection.

The use of gadolinium-based contrast is approved by the FDA. There have been no reports of dangerous health effects in people with normal kidney function.

The following information will help you better understand gadolinium-based contrast. Please talk with your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.

What is Gadolinium-based Contrast?

Gadolinium-based contrast is a substance that uses gadolinium in exams and procedures such as an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging).

An MRI uses a magnetic field to make three-dimensional (3-D) images of almost any part of your body. These images show the difference between normal tissue and abnormal tissue.

Depending on the type of MRI scan you will be having, you may need to have an IV contrast injection. The contrast will help certain areas in your body be seen better on the image.

What type of Reactions Could I Have if I Receive Gadolinium-based Contrast?

There is a small chance you could develop a reaction to the contrast. **Reactions normally occur right after the injection.** Reactions are usually mild.

Mild symptoms:

- nausea (upset stomach), vomiting (throwing up) or both
- nasal congestion
- hives
- facial swelling or flushing

Severe symptoms:

- wheezing
- shortness of breath
- drop in blood pressure
- heart irregularities.

Life-threatening reactions can happen, but are very rare. **It is important to tell your health care providers if you have ever had a reaction to gadolinium-based contrast (MRI contrast).**

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How Does My Body Get Rid of Gadolinium-based Contrast?

Your kidneys will filter the contrast through your bloodstream into your urine.

After your scan, it is important to drink plenty of water, unless your health care provider gives you other instructions. This will help your kidneys flush the contrast out of your body.

Can I Receive Gadolinium-based Contrast if I Have Kidney Disease?

It is possible. If you have severe kidney disease, there is a possible risk of developing a condition called nephrogenic systemic fibrosis (NSF) after receiving an IV contrast injection. NSF is rare disease. It causes the thickening of skin, organs and tissues.

It is important to tell your health care providers if you have kidney disease. A blood test will be done before having an MRI to check your kidney function. This will help determine your risk of getting NSF.

What Happens if I Refuse Gadolinium-based Contrast for My MRI Scan?

Contrast helps certain areas in your body be seen better on the image. This allows your health care provider to learn more about conditions such cancer, infection or swelling (inflammation.)

Not using contrast may limit the amount of information your health care provider receives about your condition.

You have a right to refuse contrast during your MRI scan. Your radiology team will do its best to get as much information as possible without using contrast.

It is possible your health care provider may ask you to have another scan with contrast in order to get more information about your condition. Talk with your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.

Is There a Limit on How Many MRI Scans with Gadolinium-based Contrast I Can Have?

No. Your radiology team will only use contrast during an exam if it is considered necessary or beneficial. In most cases, if you had contrast in the past, it is OK to have it again in a future exam.

Are There Other Tests or Scans I Can Have That Do Not Use Gadolinium-based Contrast?

Sometimes. If you have concerns about receiving contrast, please talk with your health care provider. He or she can talk with a radiologist to see what options are available for you.

In most cases, an MRI is usually the best exam to get the information needed about your condition.