Chemotherapy Infusion Complications

Chemotherapy infusion medicines are given directly into your blood through a catheter placed in your arm or chest. Two types of infusion medicines are used: non-vesicants and vesicants. These medicines can cause problems if they leak from your vein or catheter into your nearby tissues. Non-vesicants, also called irritants, are medicines that can cause irritation or inflammation if they leak to your nearby tissue. Vesicants are medicines that can cause serious damage if they leak to your nearby tissue.

Leakage into tissues is very rare but may happen for several reasons.

- Thin and fragile veins from frequent injections
- Previous IV catheter treatments
- History of peripheral vascular disease
- A limited number of veins where your IV can be placed due to skin changes from radiation treatments or a condition called lymphedema (permanent swelling of your arm)

Types of Complications

Chemotherapy infusion complications can happen if medicine leaks into your tissues. There are two types of complications: infiltration and extravasation. Infiltration is when a non-vesicant medicine leaks into your tissue. Extravasation is when a vesicant medicine leaks into your tissue. For more information on these complications, see the chart on the next page.
### Chemotherapy Complications

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<tr>
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<th>Infiltration</th>
<th>Extravasation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is it?</strong></td>
<td>When a non-vesicant medicine leaks out of your vein or catheter into your nearby tissue or skin. This may irritate or inflame your nearby tissue.</td>
<td>When a vesicant medicine leaks out of your vein or catheter into your nearby tissue or skin. This may severely damage your tissue and cause painful ulcers or sores. If left untreated, your tissue may not heal and could get worse.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How does it happen?</strong></td>
<td>This is very rare but can happen if your catheter slips out of your vein.</td>
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<td><strong>How is it treated?</strong></td>
<td>Your catheter will be removed and your arm will be lifted up so that chemotherapy medicine can drain away from your tissue.</td>
<td>Your treatment depends on the type of chemotherapy you received. Medicines and warm or cold packs may be used to treat this problem. You may need to prop your arm up on pillows.</td>
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**Tell your nurse if you have any of these signs:**

The earlier a problem is found and treated, the lower your risk of complications or damage to your tissues. You should tell your nurse right away if you have any of these signs at or near your IV site:

- Pain, burning, or stinging
- Redness
- Swelling
- Changes to your skin
- Any type of discomfort
- Any other unusual feelings

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