

Breastfeeding and Radiologic Procedures

Is the contrast media used for MRI scans (gadopentetate) safe?

Yes! Although breastfeeding mothers may be told to “pump and dump” their breast milk for some length of time according to “protocols” of a particular radiology department, this is not necessary. Gadopentetate is excreted into breast milk in extremely small amounts. Less than 0.04% of the dose given to the mother will get into her milk, and only 0.8% of THAT amount will be absorbed by her baby.

What about CT scans?

The contrast media in a CT scan is an iodinated compound that is bonded to a carrier molecule. It does not enter the milk to a significant degree. Similar iodinated compounds are used for other radiologic procedures and are not harmful.

In 2001 the American College of Radiology’s Committee on Drugs and Contrast Media made the following statement about the above two types of contrast agents:

“We believe, therefore, that the available data suggest that it is safe for the mother and infant to continue breastfeeding after receiving such an agent.”

Unfortunately, the committee, without any scientific evidence, added the following sentence: **“If the mother so desires, she may abstain from breastfeeding for 24 hours with active expression and discarding of breast milk from both breasts during that period.”** As a result, many radiology departments have not changed their “protocols”.

“Are there ANY substances used in radiology that require pumping and discarding milk?”

Yes, but they are MUCH less common than iodinated compounds and gadopentetate. Any time a mother is given a RADIOACTIVE substance, she must pump and discard her milk until the radioactivity has dissipated. The length of time it takes depends on the amount given and the type of substance. If you are to receive a radioactive substance, please find out the name of the substance and the amount you will receive. We can inform you of the length of time “pumping and dumping” is recommended.

You can also find information on radiologic contrast substances on LACTMED (toxnet.nlm.nih.gov) provided by the National Institute of Health.

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