Radiology Tests: Advice for the Breastfeeding Mother

If you need an X-ray or other procedure that uses a dye or a radioactive agent (tracer), you may have questions about how safe those agents are while breastfeeding. Dyes and tracers are used to give a clearer picture of the area being studied. You’ll want to make an informed decision whether to keep breastfeeding or to pump your milk for a while after receiving a dye or tracer. Here are some basic facts about the most common dyes and tracers used. If you need more information, call your breastfeeding resource person or the imaging department where you are having the test.

General information
Always check with the imaging department before any tests to find out what agent or dye you will be given. When you schedule the test, be sure to tell the department that you are breastfeeding.

After you know what test you will have and what you will be given, you can make an informed decision about breastfeeding and/or pumping your milk. Current research tells us that as long as a radioactive tracer is not used, there is no concern for the baby. You may also wish to talk to your health care provider about the need for the test and ask if it can be postponed until you stop breastfeeding.

Common tests and agents used
- Chest X-rays or dental X-rays do not affect breast milk or the baby. You can breastfeed without concern.
- MRIs, CT scans, Intravenous Pyelogram (IVP), ultrasound, lymph angiogram, venogram, arteriogram, myelogram, etc., do not affect the breast milk. You can breastfeed without concern.
- Barium is sometimes used as a contrast agent and it does not affect breast milk. You can breastfeed without concern.
- Mammograms are harder to read when you are breastfeeding, but they can be done. You should not stop breastfeeding to get a mammogram. If you are told to stop, discuss with your provider other ways to look at the breast tissue or lump.
- Lung scans with a radioactive tracer can be avoided by asking for a CT scan if the testing must be done.

CT Scan: X-ray contrast media containing iodine (ionic and non-ionic)

It is safe to breastfeed. Only a tiny amount of the tracer dose passes into your breast milk, so the dose that would pass to your baby is very low. Current research suggests that it is safe for you to breastfeed after you receive a contrast agent containing iodine as a part of your CT scan.

If you are concerned about the small amount of dye in your breast milk, you can pump for 24 hours after the exam and discard your milk. Before the test you should pump and store the milk to be used during that 24-hour period. After 24 hours you may resume breastfeeding without any dye being left in your breast milk.

MRI: Gadolinium-based contrast agents

It is safe to breastfeed. Again, only very tiny amounts of these agents are passed to the baby – much less than the baby would receive if he or she had the test.

If you are concerned about the small amount of dye in your breast milk, you can pump for 24 hours after the test and discard your milk. Before the test, you should pump and store the milk to be used during that 24-hour period. After 24 hours, you may resume breastfeeding without any Gadolinium dye being left in your breast milk.

Continued
Nuclear Medicine Tests

Bone scan, lung scan, Thyroid Scan with iodine-123 and others: radioactive tracers

Stop breastfeeding temporarily and store your milk in the freezer. Depending on the type of tracer used, you may have to pump your milk for a period of time. Make sure you pump enough milk before the test so that your baby can receive your milk during this time.

After the procedure, the technologist will give you specific instructions for the type and amount of radioactive tracer you received. The milk you pump after the procedure can be stored in a freezer for a designated period of time and will then be safe to give to the baby. The radioactive tracer will leave the milk during that time the same way it will leave your body.

Thyroid scan with iodine-131

Stop breastfeeding completely. In fact, this test should be avoided in breastfeeding mothers.

In many cases, the test can be delayed for several months. If a thyroid scan must be done, it should be done with iodine-123.

Questions?

If you have questions about pumping and storing your breast milk, refer to handout, *Breast Milk Removal and Storage*. For other questions or concerns, talk with your health care provider or lactation resource person.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.