

Infusion Reactions

What is an infusion reaction?

An infusion reaction is a side effect that can happen during or shortly after receiving certain IV medications, such as chemotherapy, immunotherapy, biologics, or supportive-care infusions. These reactions occur when the body responds to the medication in a heightened or sensitive way. Most reactions are mild and manageable. Emergency treatment is available when severe reactions occur.

Types of Infusion Reactions

Mild Reactions

- Flushing or warmth
- Mild itching or rash
- Headache
- Nausea
- Feeling anxious
- Slight changes in heart rate or blood pressure

Moderate Reactions

- Worsening rash or itching
- Fever or chills
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Faster heartbeat

Severe Reactions (rare)

- Trouble breathing
- Low blood pressure
- Swelling of the lips, face, or throat
- Dizziness or fainting
- Severe chest pain
- Anaphylaxis

When can an infusion reaction happen?

Infusion reactions usually occur:

- **Within the first 15–30 minutes** of starting the infusion
- **During the infusion**
- **Within a few hours after the infusion**

Occasionally, a delayed reaction may occur **within 24–48 hours**.

Why do infusion reactions happen?

Reactions can occur for several reasons:

- Your immune system may recognize the medication as foreign
- The medication may release inflammatory chemicals in the body
- Faster infusion rates may increase sensitivity

Not everyone reacts, and reactions do not mean the medication is unsafe for you long-term.

Infusion Reactions

What symptoms should I tell my nurse about immediately?

Please report *right away* if you feel:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest, throat, or back tightness
- Itching, hives, or rash
- Fever, chills, or shaking
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Any sudden change in how you feel

Your infusion team is trained to respond immediately and safely.

How are infusion reactions treated?

If symptoms occur, your team may:

- Stop the infusion temporarily
- Give medications such as:
 - Antihistamines (Benadryl)
 - Steroids
 - Acetaminophen
 - IV fluids
 - Oxygen
- Restart the infusion at a slower rate once you feel better

Severe reactions are treated quickly with emergency medications and monitoring.

Can infusion reactions be prevented?

Your provider may give *pre-medications* before each infusion to lower your risk:

- Antihistamines
- Steroids
- Acetaminophen

Slowing the infusion rate can also help. Most patients who have a reaction are able to continue treatment safely.

What should I do after I go home?

Call your ECHO care team right away if you develop:

- Fever
- Rash or itching
- Trouble breathing
- Swelling of the face, lips, or throat
- New chest pain or dizziness

If symptoms are severe, call 911 immediately.

Important reminders

- Infusion reactions are **usually manageable**, especially when reported early.
- Your nursing team monitors you closely to keep you safe.
- Always speak up if something feels “off”, no symptom is too small to mention.

For more information and helpful videos, visit echoassociates.org/education

