Arthrogram

What is an Arthrogram?

An arthrogram (r-thro-gram) is a test using a fluoroscopy machine (live x-ray) and contrast dye to look inside a joint. An arthrogram can be done on the knee, shoulder, ankle, hip, elbow, or wrist joints.

Why is it done?

Arthrograms are done for many reasons, including diagnosing a tear in the joint or ligaments. The arthrogram shows if the bones, ligaments, or cartilage inside the joint are in the correct place. A cyst inside your joint can also be seen on an arthrogram.

How is the procedure done?

A physician cleans the skin over the joint with soap. The physician marks a spot over your joint using the fluoroscopy machine. The skin is numbed and the needle is guided down to the joint. You may feel pressure or pushing during the exam.

The physician will use a small amount of dye to verify that the needle is in the correct position. Additional dye (specific to the MRI or CT machine) and numbing medication is put into the joint and the needle is removed. Air may also be put into the joint and used as a contrast if the patient has a dye allergy. The site is cleaned with alcohol and a band aid is applied. A few pictures will be taken using the fluoroscopy machine before you are taken for an MRI or CAT (CT) Scan.

What are the medications used?

- Omnipaque (contrast dye)
- Sterile Saline (salt water)
- Gadolinium contrast (MRI dye)
- Lidocaine (short-acting numbing med)
- Ropivacaine (long-acting numbing med)

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What are the risks involved with an Arthrogram?

There is a risk of skin infection whenever any needle is placed into the skin. We reduce this risk significantly by using sterile materials and sterilizing your skin. You could also have bleeding because we are using a needle, so please let the physician know if you are on blood thinners. Some patients may encounter fainting (which is called a vasovagal reaction) during the procedure, others may have pain which will usually resolve within 48 hours after the procedure.

How will I feel during and after the Procedure?

You may feel some heaviness or fullness when the contrast is injected, but most patients do not feel any pain because of the numbing medication. This sense of fullness should be relieved within several hours after the procedure. If you experience pain, you may apply an ice pack on the area for 20 minutes and take a non-aspirin pain reliever to help your symptoms. You should not participate in any exercise activities or heavy lifting for 24 hours after the procedure.

What is an MRI?

An MRI (or magnetic resonance imaging) scan is a radiology technique that uses magnetism, radio waves, and a computer to produce images of body structures. The image and resolution produced by MRI is quite detailed and can detect tiny changes of structures within the body. When an arthrogram is done prior to the MRI, contrast agents such as gadolinium are used to increase the accuracy of the images. The most important rule with an MRI is to hold still during the test. You may listen to headphones or wear earplugs to decrease the amount of noise coming from the scanner.

What is a Cat (CT) Scan?

A computerized axial tomography scan is more commonly known by its abbreviated name, CAT scan or CT scan. It is an x-ray procedure which combines many x-ray images with the aid of a computer to generate cross-sectional views and, if needed, three-dimensional images of the internal organs and structures of the body. A large donut-shaped x-ray machine takes x-ray images at many different angles around the body.

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