GALACTOGRAM (DUCTOGRAM)

A galactogram (ductogram) is a type of medical imaging used to view your breast ducts. It can be helpful in finding the cause of nipple discharge. A ductogram involves mammography and use of a contrast agent that is injected into the breast duct.

Why is it done?

Typically, your doctor will order a ductogram if you have clear or bloody nipple discharge and no abnormalities showed up on a mammogram.

Several abnormal conditions involving the milk ducts may be diagnosed with the help of a ductogram including:

- Ductal ectasia
- Fibrocystic changes
- Intraductal papillomas
- Breast cancer

A ductogram also can help direct your surgeon to the ducts that need to be removed. A ductogram is not generally used if the discharge is milky, gray, green, or blue-green, as those colors are not normally indicative of a problem. It's also not used when discharge comes from the breast of women who haven't had children, as that's most often caused by a pituitary problem or a drug side effect.

How to prepare:

On the day of your ductogram, don't use talcum powder, deodorant, or skin lotion. These can interfere with the imaging results.
Don't squeeze your nipple before the exam, as that may cause the fluid to come out, leaving little to none left for the test.
A ductogram typically takes between 30 to 60 minutes. You will want to dress comfort, as you will be asked to remove clothing from the waist up off and change into a mammo cape. Choose a loose top that is easy to remove and put back on.
You can eat and drink normally before and after the test.

What to expect during the test:

The technologist and radiologist will explain the exam and have you sign a consent. The technologist will take preliminary images and place a heating pad on the breast to help open the ducts. The technologist will clean the breast off. The radiologist will use a magnifying glass and squeeze the nipple as gentle as possible to see what duct the discharge is coming from. A small cannula with tubing, will be gently inserted right into this duct. Gentle pressure will be used, which should not produce any pain.
The tube will be taped in place and connected to a small syringe filled with contrast agent. This will be slowly injected into your milk duct. Your ducts will then feel full and you may feel some pressure inside the breast.
Your breast will be positioned as for a mammogram, and a small enough compression will be applied to the breast-enough to get a mammogram image. You may be repositioned between images so your doctor can look at things from multiple angles.
Once the radiologist has all the images needed, they will remove the cannula and tubing from the duct.

What to expect after the test:

You may have a little leakage of contrast from the nipple until the body absorbs the rest of the contrast agent, so the technologist will give you some gauze to put over your nipple inside your bra. If you have any lingering tenderness you can take over the counter pain relievers and/or heat.
Your radiologist will carefully study the images from your ductogram and send the report to your doctor. Your doctor will contact you with the results and let you know if there is anything else that needs followed up.

Risks:

Ductography does come with a few risks that you and your doctor should weigh against its benefits:

- **Injury to the duct:** Injury to the duct can occur when the catheter (cannula) is placed in the duct to deliver the contrast agent or when the material itself is injected. This is usually minor and heals on its own, although may require treatment with antibiotics if the patient experiences redness and inflammation.

- **Infection:** In rare cases, mastitis (infection of the breast) may develop as a result of this procedure.

- **Allergy:** It's possible (but rare) to have an allergic reaction to the contrast materials used in this test. Let your doctor know if you've previously had an allergic reaction when undergoing imaging.

- **Pregnancy:** If you are or could be pregnant, make sure you let your doctor and technologist know. They can take special precautions to protect your baby from radiation. Depending on the reason for the ductogram, your doctor may want to delay the test until after your baby is born.