

Understanding my syringe pump

What is a syringe pump?

The syringe pump is a small battery operated pump that pushes a syringe to deliver a steady flow of injected medication continuously.

The syringe that is connected to the pump is filled with medication prescribed by your doctor to help control your symptoms. The medication is reviewed on a regular basis and may be changed if necessary.

Why am I having a syringe pump?

You might have been given a syringe pump, to help control pain, sickness, distress or secretions.

Your nurse or doctor will explain to you why it's being used and answer your questions. syringe pumps are used, for example, when:

- **Your symptoms are difficult to control by tablets or you are unable to take the amount of tablets that you require**
- **You cannot take medication by mouth, due to difficulty in swallowing**
- **You are feeling sick or are vomiting and unable to keep your medicines in your stomach long enough for them to work**
- **You are coming to the end of your life and sleeping most of the time and not able to wake to take your tablets**
- **You have pain and/or other symptoms, and a regular flow of medication is needed to control it**
- **You need repeated injections to keep you comfortable**

Setting up and checking your syringe pump

Your syringe pump will be set up for you either by your District or Hospice nurse. The syringe pump is set to dispense your medication over 24 hours.

The nurse will place the needle just under the skin, either on your chest, your stomach or on the top of your arm or leg. This will feel like having a small injection. The needle is withdrawn to leave a small plastic tube which is held in place with a small, clear dressing, so that the site can be checked. Usually, this can stay in one place for several days

Managing my syringe pump at home

Each day the District Nurse will come to check how you are, they will fill up a new syringe and check the machine. The District Nurse will also check that you have enough drugs for the syringe pump.

It would be helpful if you could provide a place where the spare equipment and medications could be stored, e.g. a shoe box.

You will also be given a small yellow 'sharps' box, so that used syringes can be disposed of safely. The District Nurse will advise you who will collect the sharps from your home.

Your symptoms

Tell your District Nurse about your symptoms, so that they can check how well the medicine is working. They can make changes to the dose of medicine if necessary.

Your skin

Sometimes the medicines in the syringe can make your skin red or sore or swollen. Your District Nurse will check the area around the site each time they visit. If it gets sore or uncomfortable, the nurse will insert a new one in another place.

Bathing/Showering

Try to keep the site dry, if possible. Keep the machine away from the water by putting it on a stool beside the bath/shower. If the syringe pump gets wet, it will no longer work. You may find that you need to have someone with you whilst bathing/showering.

Clothes

You may dress as normal. You don't need any special clothing. The syringe pump fits into a holster, which can be worn over the shoulder or around the waist. The syringe pump may also fit into a dressing gown/jacket pocket.

Eating

You can eat and drink whatever you like. A small amount of alcohol will do you no harm.

Going out

You can go out and about with the syringe pump. If you drive, you should ask the nurse if the medicines in the pump will affect your driving. For more information please ask for a leaflet on strong painkillers and driving.

How will I know if the syringe pump is working?

Your syringe pump will have an inbuilt computer and a small screen. It calculates the rate at which the medication you've been prescribed should be given and displays this on the screen.

The syringe pump makes a slight whirring noise when it's on. This is normal and means that it's working properly.

When the syringe pump is working normally a green light will flash at regular intervals. If the pump has stopped the light will be red. An alarm will sound if something is not working correctly such as blockages or leaks. Blockages can happen if you lie on one of the tubes, for example. If the device stops working, don't worry as the effect of the medication will last for a while. Call your District Nurse as soon as possible.

Taking care of your syringe pump

In general, syringe pumps are reliable and don't need a lot of care, but it's important to:

- **Keep the syringe pump and area around the site dry**
- **Keep your medication in a safe place, out of reach of children or vulnerable adults and out of sunlight**
- **Avoid exposing the syringe pump to direct sunlight or heat as this can affect the medicines in your pump**
- **Avoid tampering with the syringe pump as this may affect its effectiveness**

If any of the following happen you must let the District Nurse know as soon as possible:

- **The syringe pump gets wet**
- **The syringe pump is accidentally dropped**
- **The colour of the medicines in the tubing or syringe has changed**
- **The skin around the site is red, swollen or sore**
- **Liquid leaks where the plastic goes into the skin**
- **The plastic tube comes out**
- **The tubing is not connected to the syringe**
- **The syringe is empty**
- **The alarm is sounding**
- **The syringe pump stops working**

When your symptoms are under control, your tablets may be restarted. The syringe pump can then be stopped. Please return your syringe pump to the health care professional who provided it to you.

Comments

We are always pleased to hear any comments about the services we are providing. Your feedback helps us to maintain a high standard of service and we are really keen to hear from you. You can also complete our feedback survey via our website.

Please visit: www.farleighhospice.org/feedback

Useful Numbers:

General enquiries: 01245 457300

Inpatient Unit (IPU): 01245 457361

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