

Syringe driver

Information and advice for patients

Palliative care

What is a syringe driver?

A syringe driver is a portable battery-operated pump with a syringe containing medication to manage symptoms. It allows the medication to be delivered at a regular rate over 24 hours and is small enough to be carried in a pouch attached to a belt, a shoulder holster or large pocket.



What are the benefits of a syringe driver?

- Some people find it difficult to swallow their medication in tablet or syrup form.
- Some people may feel sick or vomit frequently which means they can't keep their tablets in their stomach long enough for them to work.
- Some people's symptoms are difficult to control by tablets alone and a syringe driver may be used as well.

Instead of having repeated injections to receive their medication the syringe driver can provide people with a simpler and more comfortable way to receive medication. Once the correct dosage has been established, levels of medication in your blood will remain steady, maximising the benefit. It is portable and light and can be worn under clothing so you can remain independent.

Before using a syringe driver

The nurses and doctors will have discussed with you the reasons why a syringe driver has been chosen as the best way for you to receive your medication. The nurse will explain how the syringe driver works to you and your family / carers and answer any questions you may have about it.

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Using a syringe driver

The syringe in the syringe driver is attached to a thin piece of tubing which has a fine needle attached at the other end. The nurse will insert this needle just under the skin on your chest, tummy, the top of your arm or leg and will secure it in place with a clear dressing. Once the needle is in place, you should not feel it and it can stay there for a few days.

The nurse looking after you will refill your syringe once everyday. If you are at home, a district nurse will come to your home to do this. At the same time they will:

- Check that your machine is working properly
- Check that the needle site is not painful, leaking, red or swollen
- Check on your symptoms
- Replace the needle in a different part of the body every few days

If you are at all worried that the syringe driver is not working, tell a nurse immediately.

How long will I need the syringe driver for?

You may only need to use a syringe driver for a few days or weeks. The nurse looking after you will give more detail about the amount of time you may need it for.

Do

- Report any soreness, redness, irritation or swelling at the needle site to your nurse
- Contact the nurse if the needle accidentally comes out.
- Contact your nurse or doctor if you have any concerns regarding your syringe driver or medication
- Keep all drugs away from children preferably in a locked cupboard
- Keep the syringe contents out of direct sunlight. They must also not become too warm. Please ask your nurse for advice on the best place to keep your driver.
- Take care when walking around with the syringe driver, use the holster provided or put the syringe driver in a pocket.

Do not

- Immerse the syringe driver in water. You can have a bath or a shower but try to keep the needle site dry and keep the machine out of the water by putting it on a stool by the bath or shower.
- Do not attempt to change the settings.
- Place the syringe driver above the height of the needle site.

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Things to report to your nurse

If the syringe driver is accidentally dropped, immersed in water or contaminated by fluids in any way, contact your nurse immediately as she/he will need to bring you a new syringe driver and return the other for inspection.

What to do with the syringe driver while sleeping?

Some people find it useful to tuck the syringe driver under their pillow at night to keep it from falling out of bed.

Alarms on the syringe driver to be aware of

There is an alarm on the syringe driver that will beep if there is a problem. The alarm usually sounds for one of two reasons:

- There is a blockage to the flow of medication caused by a kink in the long tubing.
- The syringe is empty.

If the alarm sounds contact your nurse.

Contact details

If you are in hospital and have any questions or concerns about your syringe driver, please contact the Palliative care team on one of the following numbers, or ask a member of staff to contact them for you:

Palliative Care Team

Sandwell Hospital
Tel: 0121 507 2511

City Hospital

Tel: 0121 507 5296

If you are at home and have any questions or concerns about your syringe driver please contact your district nurse.

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Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Dickman et al, 'The Syringe Driver', Oxford University Press, 2005
- Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, 'Infusion systems', 2003
- Mitten T, 'Subcutaneous drug infusion: a review of problems and solutions', International Journal of Palliative Nursing, 2001
- Tycross R, 'Palliative Care Formulary', 4th Edition, 2012

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5303 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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