Administering self-injected medications

Walgreens
Specialty Pharmacy

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How to properly administer medications requiring self-injection

This information is intended to be used as a four-step supplement to the full instructions for medication use. This guide is not intended to replace those instructions. Please discuss any questions you may have with your healthcare provider.

Your clinicians at your doctor's office or those associated with the manufacturer of your medication may offer free, one-on-one injection training. Be sure to ask. Training should include an overview of the skills necessary to carry out your injections at the doctor's office or at your home or office. In case your clinicians do not offer these services, ask them if they can direct you to appropriate resources. Receiving injection training can help you manage your treatment effectively, safely and confidently, especially as you start giving your injections.

For your reference, we have included an overview of the four steps required for self-injection.

If you are giving your injection with an injection device, always refer to the medication guide, package insert or website for injection instructions specific to the device. Also be sure to follow the directions about your medication's specific storage, preparation and administration provided in the medication guide or package insert.

These steps are general, self-injection principles that are intended to be used as a supplement to your injection training with a clinician.

Step 1: Setting up your medication

Step 2: Preparing to give your injection

Step 3: Administering your injection

Step 4: Disposing of used needles and syringes

Step 1: Setting up your medication

Wash your hands

It is important to begin by washing your hands thoroughly to prevent infection. A thorough hand-washing includes scrubbing the backs of hands, fingertips, thumbs, under the fingernails and between fingers.

The following steps take you through the hand-washing process with soap and water:

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water.
2. Put soap on your hands.
3. Lather water and soap on all areas of your hands.
4. Rub hands back and forth.
5. Keep rubbing hands for about 15 to 20 seconds — the same amount of time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice.
6. Rinse soap off hands.
7. Before turning off the water, dry hands using a paper towel or air dryer. Then, use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.

Washing with soap and water is the most effective way to remove germs and dirt. If soap and water are not available, you can use an alcohol-based sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol (the product label should list this information) and follow these steps:

1. Apply enough sanitizer on your hands to cover all surfaces.
2. Rub hands and fingers together.
3. Cover all areas on the hands.
4. Keep rubbing hands together until hands are dry.

Prepare your medication and syringe

1. If your medication is stored in the refrigerator, remove it from the refrigerator and allow it to warm to room temperature, which usually takes about 30 minutes. DO NOT try to warm it with any other methods such as microwaving, soaking in warm water, shaking or rolling the medication between your hands. This may damage the medication or make it less effective.
2. Find a clean, dry surface — perhaps a bathroom or kitchen counter or table. Wipe the area with an antibacterial cloth or put down a clean paper towel before laying out your injection supplies. This might include alcohol wipes, gauze, a syringe and a needle. **Never** reuse syringes or needles.
3. Inspect your medications.
   - Check to make sure your medication has not expired
   - Make sure that your medication matches the manufacturer's description of the product (color, consistency)
   - Look for any particles floating in the medication vial
   - Contact your doctor or pharmacy if you have any of the above issues with your medication
4. It is important that you understand and follow directions for the preparation and administration of your medication contained within the medication guide or package insert.
   - Your medication may be in a prefilled syringe that does not require mixing. If you are using a prefilled syringe, you may not need to prime the syringe. It is important to check for air bubbles and to see if the level of the medication is at the top of the needle.
   - If you need to prime the syringe to remove all the air from it, hold the syringe pointing upward, and gently tap the sides to force any air bubbles to the top. Push the plunger slowly until you see one or two drops come out from the tip of the needle. This ensures that all air is out.
   - If your medication preparation requires mixing diluent (liquid) with dry powder, follow the directions as specified in the medication guide or package insert.
   - For pen devices, refer to the medication guide, package insert or manufacturer website for injection instructions specific to the device, as each one is different.

Step 2: Preparing to give your injection

Injection site

Your doctor will tell you whether your medication is injected into subcutaneous tissue or intramuscular tissue. Do not inject into areas where your skin is tender, swollen, bruised, red or hard, or where you have scars or other tissue or skin injury.

- A **subcutaneous (SQ) injection** places medication into the fatty tissue directly beneath the skin using a short injection needle. Injection sites typically include the outer surface of the upper arm, abdomen (except belly button area or waistline), or the top, outer part of the thigh. Buttocks can be used if appropriate. The best areas on your body to give yourself an SQ injection are *(See Figure 1)*[10]:
- Upper arms, at least 3 in. (7.5 cm) below your shoulder and 3 in. (7.5 cm) above your elbow, on the side or back
- Outer side of upper thighs
- Belly area, below your ribs and above your hip bones, at least 2 in. (5 cm) away from your belly button

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for specific injection sites. Different products may be recommended for certain areas, such as the abdomen or thighs.

- An **intramuscular injection** places medication into deep muscle tissue using an injection needle longer than those used for subcutaneous injections. Injection sites typically include the mid-thigh or upper, outer quadrant of the buttocks *(See Figure 2)*.

Figure 1. Body sites for subcutaneous injection

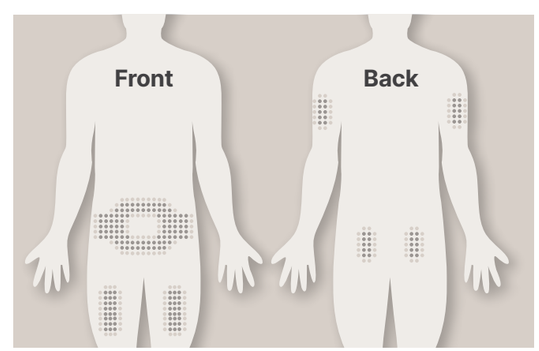
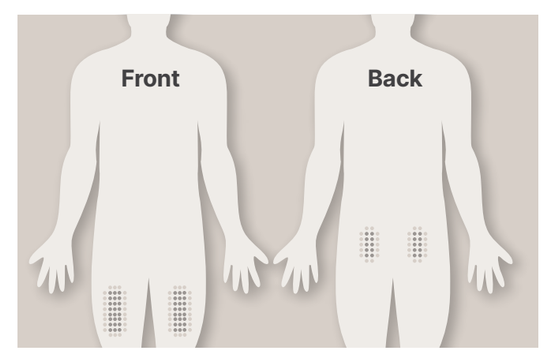


Figure 2. Body sites for intramuscular injection



General considerations for injection preparation and sites

- Prior to giving the injection, clean the injection site with an alcohol wipe starting at the puncture site, using firm pressure and working your way outward in a circular motion. Let the alcohol dry for a few seconds. Do not fan it or blow on it to make it dry. This can get germs on the intended site.
- When appropriate, it is recommended that you alternate injection sites each time you give an injection. Keeping a written record of your injection locations can be helpful in recalling where you injected last. Check with your doctor regarding recommended and approved injection sites for your specific medications.

Step 3: Administering your injection

Subcutaneous injection

Selecting an area for a subcutaneous injection will depend on directions from your doctor and your medication's instructions. You should choose a different site for each new injection. Rotate your injection site as recommended by the manufacturer.

1. Remove the needle cover, being careful not to touch the needle. Hold the syringe as you would a pencil.
2. With your free hand, gently pinch the skin and fatty tissue at the injection site.
3. Quickly insert the needle at a 90-degree angle all the way into the site. Small children and persons with very little subcutaneous fat might be taught to use a 45-degree angle *(See Figure 3)*. If inserting the needle at a 45-degree angle, make sure the opening of the needle is facing up while the point enters the skin first. Insert the needle using a quick motion. A slow, gentle push may cause more pain.

Intramuscular injection

Choosing an area for an intramuscular injection will depend on directions from your doctor and your medication's instructions. Check with your doctor or nurse if you have questions.

1. Remove the needle cover, being careful not to touch the needle. Hold the syringe as you would a pencil.
2. With your thumb and index finger of your free hand, stretch the skin of the injection site slightly. Try to relax the muscle you will be injecting, as injecting into a tense muscle can be more painful.
3. Holding the syringe straight up at a 90-degree angle from the injection site, insert the needle using a quick motion. A slow, gentle push may cause more pain *(See Figure 4)*. Your next steps will depend on whether or not your doctor instructed you to pull back on the plunger before giving the injection. See options A and B below.

Figure 3. Angle of needle insertion for subcutaneous injection

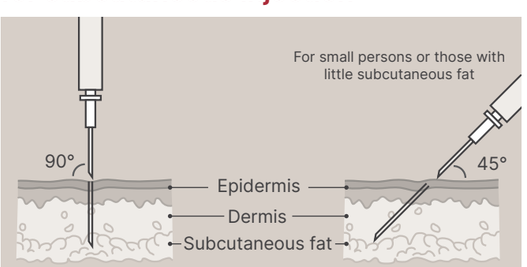
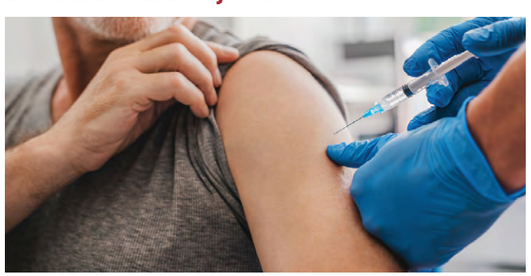


Figure 4. Example of intramuscular injection



A. If you were **not** instructed to pull back on the plunger, **or** if you were instructed to do so **and** no blood enters the syringe:

4. Inject the medication by gently pushing down on the plunger until the syringe is empty.
5. Remove the needle gently but quickly, straight out from the site. Then apply pressure to the injection site with a gauze pad.
6. Apply a bandage if necessary.

Note: Your doctor or some medication instructions may direct you to replace the needle only before proceeding.

B. If you were instructed to pull back on the plunger **and** blood enters the syringe (this does not happen often):

7. Do **not** give the injection.
8. Remove the needle gently but quickly, and apply pressure to the injection site with a gauze pad. Apply a bandage if necessary.
9. You may need to exchange the needle for a new needle or prepare another injection, depending on manufacturer and healthcare provider instructions.
10. Prepare another injection. Begin the entire process again, from Page 4 for a subcutaneous injection or for an intramuscular injection.

Step 4: Disposing of used needles and syringes

Safely disposing used needles and syringes is always important — at home, work, school or on the road traveling. Used needles and other sharps are dangerous to people and pets if not disposed of safely because they can injure people and spread infections that cause serious health conditions. It is your responsibility to properly dispose of used needles and syringes in a puncture-resistant sharps disposal container *(See Figure 5)*. You can obtain a sharps container from Walgreens at any time; ask on your next refill call.

You can take steps to keep the disposal process safe:

1. Keep the puncture-resistant sharps container out of the reach of children or animals. Getting stuck with a used needle or coming in contact with a used syringe can cause a number of problems, including:
   - The spread of bacterial or viral infections and diseases like HIV/AIDS, syphilis, hepatitis and tetanus
   - Emotional trauma and worry about potential illnesses
   - Unexpected medical expenses to cover the cost of testing for potential illnesses and treatment

2. When the puncture-resistant sharps container is about two-thirds full, secure the lid closed and follow your community guidelines for getting rid of the container.

3. Dispose of all puncture-resistant sharps disposal containers at designated collection sites and programs in your community, such as:
   - Drop-off collection sites
   - Household hazardous waste centers
   - Residential special waste pickup services
   - Syringe exchange programs
   - Mail-back services

4. Practice safe needle use and disposal:
   - Never reuse needles or recap needles on a syringe
   - Do not throw loose needles or syringes in the garbage
   - Never flush loose needles or syringes down the toilet
   - Do not place loose needles or syringes in recycling bins or containers

Figure 5. Puncture-resistant sharps disposal container

We provide this information because the more you know about administering self-injected medications, the better you'll be able to manage it.

Additionally, the Walgreens Specialty Team is here to support you with dependable, personalized service to help manage your medication side effects and stay on track with your prescribed therapy.

We look forward to being a member of your healthcare team and helping you get the best results from your treatment.

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Walgreens provides specialty pharmacy services and support for patients who are taking medications that treat chronic, long-term conditions. Our dedicated Care Team — including pharmacists and patient care advocates — understand your specialty medications and how to take them. We help you stay on track with your therapy by delivering your medication on time, coordinating your refills and bringing you peace of mind. For more information, call 888-782-8443; (hearing impaired (TTY) 866-830-4366) or visit **Walgreens.com**.

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Resources

You might find it helpful to contact these organizations for additional support and resources.*

For more information about needle and syringe disposal rules and programs in your state, talk to your doctor, local public health department or one of the following organizations:*

Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov/rcra/medical-waste#sharps

SafeNeedleDisposal.org
www.safeneedledisposal.org
800-643-1643
www.facebook.com/safeneedledisposal
@safe_needle

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