

Patient Information

Palliative Care Team

Syringe Drivers

What is a syringe driver?

A syringe driver is a lightweight battery-operated pump with a syringe containing medication which is used to treat a person's symptoms.

The pump allows the medication to be delivered at a regular rate over 24 hours.

It is small enough to be carried around in a bag, attached to a belt or in a clothing pocket and so doesn't hinder usual daily activities.

It is recommended that a syringe driver is kept in a "lock-box" (locked box) which is a hard plastic container designed for this purpose with its own key lock.



Why are syringe drivers used?

- Sometimes people may find it difficult to swallow their medication in tablet or syrup form.
- Sometimes people may feel sick or vomit frequently so the medication doesn't stay in their stomach long enough to work.
- Sometimes a person's symptoms are difficult to control by tablets alone and a syringe driver may be used as well.



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- Instead of having repeated injections of a medication to treat any symptoms, a syringe driver can provide a more comfortable way to help gain control of symptoms by delivering a constant level of medication.
- The medication will be prescribed by a doctor or nurse prescriber.

Before using a syringe driver

If you or your relative is thought likely to benefit from using a syringe driver, the nurses and doctors will explain the reasons why a syringe driver has been suggested. The nurse will explain how the syringe driver works and can answer any questions you or your relative may have about it.

Using a syringe driver

The syringe in the syringe driver is attached to a needle or thin piece of tubing attached at the other end. The nurse will insert the needle just under the skin on your:

- chest,
- tummy,
- the top of your arm or leg or
- back such as over a shoulder blade.

and will secure the tubing in place with a clear dressing. Once the needle and tubing is in place, you should not feel this and this can stay in place for a few days.

The correct dose of medication is calculated based on what has been required previously and additional injections can be given if symptoms break through and the dosages in the syringe driver will be adjusted accordingly.

The nurse looking after you will refill your syringe once every day.

If you are at home, a district nurse will come to your home to do this.

If you are in the hospital or hospice the ward nurses will check the syringe driver every few hours.

When the nurse checks the syringe driver 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; see Contact details at the end of this leaflet.

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.

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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 and do not allow the syringe driver to become too warm.
- Take care when walking around with the syringe driver, use the holster provided or put the syringe driver in a pocket.
- Please ask your nurse for advice on the best place to keep your driver.

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.

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 or needs replenishing soon

If the alarm sounds contact your nurse, but if you know a nurse is due to attend to change the syringe driver, don't worry as the effect of the medicines will continue for a while.

How to return a syringe driver when it is no longer needed

When the syringe driver is no longer required, please contact your nurse who will come and collect it from you.

Patient Information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this Information in another language or format please contact the Palliative Care team on 02476 965498 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

Help us to get it right

If you have a complaint, concern, comment or compliment please let us know by speaking to a member of our staff. We learn from your feedback and use the information to improve and develop our services.

If you would like to talk to someone outside the service contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 0800 028 4203 or email your queries on feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

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