

Patient information

Syringe pumps

This leaflet aims to answer some of the most commonly asked questions about syringe pumps. As you are being offered one for your medication we hope this information is helpful. However, if anything is unclear, please feel free to talk to a member of the Palliative Care Team, ward or community team caring for you.



Introduction

The syringe pump is battery powered and is placed in a lockable clear plastic box, which can be carried. Alternatively, if you have a shoulder bag provided, it can be placed in this so your mobility is not restricted.

Attached to the pump will be a syringe containing your medication. This will be attached to a length of thin tubing with a thin plastic needle at the end.

When a syringe pump is started, the nurse will place the plastic needle just under the skin. This needle will be placed either on your chest, tummy or the top of your arm or leg. This will be held in place with a small clear dressing. You may feel the plastic needle as it is inserted into the skin but this feeling will soon wear off. The needle can stay in one place for several days and will be taken out and a new one inserted if the needle gets sore or uncomfortable.

The syringe pump uses a 9-volt alkaline battery which is provided by your healthcare team. When the syringe pump is working, a light on the front of the syringe pump flashes green to indicate the battery has power.

The syringe pump doesn't make a noise whilst working. However, when the infusion is complete or the syringe pump detects a problem you will hear an alarm, the infusion will stop and a message appears on the display screen indicating the cause of the alarm. The light on the front of the syringe pump turns red.

A new battery may last for approximately 4 - 5 days, however, new syringe pump models require a battery change every 24 hours. When the battery is almost depleted, with 30 minutes left to run, the display screen on the syringe pump will read 'Low Battery' and the alarm will beep intermittently. As the battery depletes, the screen will display 'End Battery' and the syringe pump will stop and will alarm until the battery is exhausted.

With some new versions of the pump, the alarm will continue until a new battery is placed and the pump switched on again.

In any of the above situations, please notify your nurse (see guidance on changing battery overleaf).

What are the advantages of a syringe pump?

People of all ages with various medical conditions use a syringe pump for a number of reasons. Sometimes medication can be difficult to take by mouth because of nausea or vomiting, or difficulty in swallowing. The syringe pump enables you to continue receiving your essential medication such as painkillers and/or anti-sickness preparations.

The syringe pump can also be used as a temporary method of receiving treatment to control symptoms prior to a return to oral medication (tablets or liquids) or it can be used for longer periods of time for patients on regular medication.

Why do I need a pump?

Sometimes it is easier for you to have some of your medicines this way. This may be because:

- You have been vomiting and find it difficult to keep your medicines down. Medicines to help stop vomiting are given in the syringe pump, along with medicines to help other symptoms such as pain. Once the vomiting has settled you may go back to having your medicines by mouth.
- You have so many medicines to take that you are finding it difficult to manage them all. Putting some of the medicines in the syringe pump can reduce the number of medicines you need to take by mouth.
- You are unable to swallow medicines. Medicines to help your symptoms can be put into the syringe pump.

Starting a syringe pump does not mean that your medicines have stopped working or aren't strong enough, only that this is a more effective way of getting them into your body, if you cannot take them by mouth.

Dispelling the myths

Some people are concerned that having a syringe pump can make death come sooner. There is no evidence to suggest that this is true. Syringe pumps are often used at the end of life because they are the easiest way to give someone the medicines they need to feel comfortable at that time.

Some do's and don'ts

The medicines in the syringe pump will work in your bloodstream throughout the 24-hour period, controlling your symptoms. Any adjustments to the medications will be made by the hospital or hospice staff, GP or community nurse. Do not interfere with the syringe pump.

You must keep the syringe pump and the infusion site dry. Take care when washing or bathing to keep the syringe pump dry. If you drop it into water, contact your nurse. A new syringe pump will be needed to ensure that your medicines are being given at the right rate.

The syringe pump should not be exposed to direct sunlight, as the medications inside the pump may be affected. If going outside, the syringe pump must be in a shoulder bag, so it is covered and protected from direct sunlight. This can be provided by your healthcare team.

The syringe pump should not be exposed to extremes of heat. Avoid placing the syringe pump next to a heat pad, electric blanket or hot water bottle. Do not cover the syringe pump with blankets or a duvet. However, just placed under a bed sheet is fine.

If you notice any of the following, contact your nurse as soon as possible:

- The colour of the medicines in the syringe or tubing has changed.
- There is cloudiness or sediment in the tubing.
- The skin around the needle is red, swollen or painful or the dressing starts to peel off.
- The alarm on the pump sounds.

The display screen reads 'Low Battery' (see additional notes).

Further information

Whilst in hospital, if you have any questions, please discuss with ward staff or telephone the Palliative Care Team on 01284 713776, who are available Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 4.00pm, or email:

palliativecare@wsh.nhs.uk

If you are discharged from hospital with a syringe pump, the hospital will refer you to the Community Nursing Service. The syringe pump will be exchanged for a community issued pump by the community nurse / other discharge destination (such as nursing home). The hospital syringe pump will then be returned by the community team.

Any problems with the syringe pump once discharged from hospital, contact your community nurse or GP.

For further advice

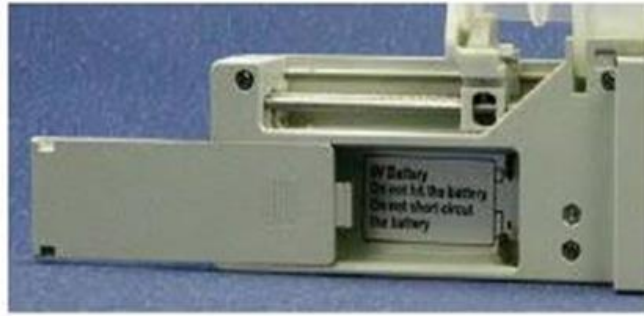
**For community nurse advice call the
Central Coordination Centre (CCC): 0300 123 2425**

**St Nicholas Hospice Care 24-hour support line call:
01284 766133**

How to change a battery

There may be circumstances in the community when patients or carers will need to change the battery. This should be discussed with your healthcare professional and ideally you should be shown how to do this. The following guidance demonstrates how to change a battery.

- 1 With the infusion still running (or if the pump has stopped) remove the old battery from the pump and replace with the new battery provided by sliding off the battery cover at the back of the unit. This can be accessed with the clear lock box still on.



- 2 Once the new battery is inserted and the battery cover replaced, switch the pump back on by pressing the on / off button.



- 3 Press YES / ► Green button to confirm the size and make of the syringe.
- 4 Press YES / ► Green button to resume the infusion.
- 5 Press YES / ► Green button to confirm the infusion.
- 6 The screen then displays 'Start Infusion'. Press YES / ► to confirm.
- 7 The syringe pump should now be infusing. Make a note of the time that the battery was changed.

Notes

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo) <https://www.accessable.co.uk>



© West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust