

You and your syringe driver



Information for patients Palliative Care

What is a syringe driver?

A syringe driver is a small, portable, battery operated pump. It can be carried about in a locked box and pouch attached to a belt or worn over the shoulder. The pump is fitted with a syringe, which gives your medicines through a needle just under the skin. The pump runs 24 hours a day, avoiding the need for repeated injections.

Why do I need one?

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 medicine down. Medicines to help reduce or stop the vomiting can be given in the syringe driver, along with medicines to help other symptoms such as pain. Once the vomiting has settled you may be able to go back to having your medicines by mouth.
- You have so many medicines to take that you are finding it difficult to swallow them all. Putting some of the medicines in the syringe driver 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 driver.

Living with your syringe driver

- The medicines in the syringe driver will be absorbed into your body throughout a 24 hour period, to aim to control your symptoms. Any adjustments of the medicines will be made by your GP/Community Nurse or ward team. Do not interfere with the syringe or the pump.
- **You must keep the syringe driver and the needle site dry, especially when washing or bathing.** If you drop the pump into water, contact your nurse, as you will need a new syringe driver to be sure that your medicines are being given correctly.
- The syringe in the pump should not be exposed to direct sunlight.
- The syringe driver should not be exposed to extremes of heat. Avoid placing the syringe driver next to a heat pad, electric blanket or hot water bottle.
- You can go out and about with the syringe driver as it can be carried in the pouch supplied.
Please note: you should ask your doctor if your medicine in the syringe driver allows you to drive.

- If possible, eat and drink as normal. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist to see if your medication allows you to drink alcohol if you wish.
- It is advisable **not** to use a mobile phone near a syringe driver as it may affect the way the pump works. Try to keep mobile phones that are switched on about an arm's length away.

How do I know that my syringe driver is working?

- The light above the 'ON/OFF' button will flash green about every 30 seconds and the display will show 'PUMP DELIVERING'. If it turns red, there is a problem with the pump – contact your nurse as soon as possible.
- Sometimes it is necessary to take some additional medicines even though your syringe driver is in place. If you are at home and are still able to swallow medicines, you should be prescribed 'as needed' medicines for symptoms such as pain, sickness or anxiety. Let your community nurse or GP know if you have taken any such medicines over the course of the day/previous 24 hours.

Who will look after my syringe driver?

If you are at home, the community nursing team will come in each day to refill the syringe, check that the needle is comfortable and that there are no problems with the medicines.

Community Nurse contact number: _____

If you are in hospital, a hospice or care home, the staff will change the syringe each day and regularly check that the pump is working correctly. They will make sure that the needle is comfortable and that you are not having any problems with the medicines.

If you notice any of the following, tell your Community Nurse, GP or the ward/care home team:

- The colour of the medicines in the tubing or syringe has changed
- There is a cloudiness or sediment in the tubing or syringe
- The skin around the needle is red, swollen or painful
- The alarm on the pump sounds
- Any leakage of liquid/fluid at the injection site
- The needle comes out

This leaflet is based on one produced by Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, and is amended with their kind permission for use here.



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