



Practical

How to inject yourself with heparin

Heparin is used to prevent blood clots from forming and to stop the growth of clots that have already formed in the blood vessels. It is often prescribed in antiphospholipid syndrome (APS) – either in combination with aspirin to treat pregnant women, or for other patients who are warfarin intolerant or find aspirin alone does not alleviate their symptoms. In the UK, heparin has the trade names of Clexane and Fragmin.

Heparin is a very safe anticoagulant but it does have one drawback: you have to inject it once a day. Due to its composition, it is not possible to take it orally so you have to inject into the skin (not muscle) so it can get into your bloodstream and start working straight away.

It can be quite daunting when you are given the injections for the first time and told to either do them yourself or get a partner/friend to help you, so we have written the following instructions to help you:

1. Remove cap from needle.
2. Gently pick up a well-defined fold of skin from either around stomach, thighs, bottom or hips. It is very important to move the site of your injection day to day, as this will allow the heparin to enter the bloodstream in a uniform way. Hard areas of skin can develop if you only inject in a couple of areas and these can prevent the heparin from getting into your bloodstream. It will also prevent one area from becoming too bruised.
3. Hold the syringe in a dart fashion and insert the needle directly into the skin at a 45-90 degree angle just into the layer of fat under the skin surface.
4. Move your hand or finger in position to direct the plunger. Do not remove the needle once it is inserted and do not pull back on the plunger (this prevents damage to the small blood vessels which could lead to bleeding and bruising).
5. Push down on plunger very slowly as far as it will go.
6. When all the heparin has been injected, slowly withdraw the needle at the same angle at which it entered, and also releasing the skin roll as you withdraw.
7. Do not rub the area. Rubbing the area increases the chances for bruising and bleeding. You may need to press on the area for about a minute to stop any bleeding.
8. Apply a plaster only if necessary. Discard the needle in a sharps bin or safe receptacle.

Try to be brave! Remember that it will get easier with practice.