

Patient Information Sheet

A Guide to Syringe Pumps and Anticipatory ('just in case') Medications

What is a Syringe Pump?

A syringe pump is a small battery operated pump. It contains a syringe that allows medication to be given evenly over a set period of time, usually 24 hours, preventing the need for repeated injections. It can be carried about in a pouch attached to a belt or in your pocket.

Why do I need a syringe Pump?

There are many reasons why you may need a syringe pump. Sometimes it is easier for you to have your medication this way because of:

- Vomiting and difficulty keeping medication down.
- Having so many medications that you are finding it difficult to take them all
- Difficulty swallowing medications

Having a syringe pump does not mean that your medications 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.

How does a syringe pump work?

The syringe pump pushes the plunger of the syringe to deliver the medication into your body at a set rate. The syringe is connected to a length of tubing to which a needle free device is attached. The nurse will place the needle free device under the skin and it will be carefully secured so that it does not become dislodged.

Once set up and running the syringe pump is very quiet. A small flashing light will show you that the battery is working. It is important that the syringe pump and infusion site are kept dry. It is therefore important to take care when washing or bathing. If you drop it into water you must contact your nurse as a new syringe pump may be required to ensure that the medication is being administered correctly.

The syringe pump must be protected from light and extremes of heat – it is important to keep it away from heat pads, hot water bottles, or electric blankets.

If you notice any of the following changes it is important to contact you nurse:

- Change in colour of medication
- Cloudiness or sediment in the tubing attached to the syringe pump
- Pain or redness around the skin where the needle free device is
- The alarm on the pump is sounding
- The light stops flashing

What are anticipatory medications?

Anticipatory medications are a small supply of additional medications that your healthcare team think may be needed in the coming days or weeks. Some may be additional doses of the medications that you are receiving via the syringe pump in case you require additional doses. Other medication may be for other symptoms that you are not currently receiving medication for via your syringe pump.

The anticipatory medications are for you to have at home just in case they are needed as sometimes it can be difficult to get these medications quickly, such as at night or at the weekend so it is very helpful to have them ready – just in case. They will help to relieve any distressing symptoms such as pain, nausea, sickness or anxiety that you may experience while you are at home. **The medications should only be given by a doctor or a nurse.**

What medicines are used in syringe pump and as anticipatory medications?

The common medications used are:

- Morphine Sulfate or oxycodone– to relieve pain and shortness of breath
- Levomepromazine or metoclopramide – to relieve sickness
- Haloperidol – to relieve sickness, hallucinations and restlessness
- Midazolam – to relieve restlessness
- Glycopyrronium or hyoscine – to relieve secretions in the chest

You may not receive all of these medications or you may receive ones that are not included on this list. The medications you receive will be tailored to your needs.

As well as the medications you will be given a form for the nurses that will be caring for you. This form enables the nurses to administer the medications in the syringe pump to you each day and administer the anticipatory medication to you if/when they are required.

How should medications for my syringe pump and anticipatory medications be stored?

The syringe pump medications and anticipatory medications are specific to you and should not be given to anyone else. They do not need to be kept in the fridge but should be kept in a safe place, out of the reach of any children.

What should I do with any medications that are not used?

If there are medications left that are not required they should be taken to a community pharmacy for destruction. They must not be given to any other patient.

Who provides syringe pump and anticipatory medications?

The medications can be prescribed by a variety of people, such as:

- Hospital
- GP
- Hospice
- End of life care team

Even if you were initially given the medications by the hospital or hospice the need for you to continue to have the medication will be kept under the review of your GP with the help of the community nursing team. They will also check to see if any changes need to be made to the medications.

Once you are at home a nurse will attend to you every day to replace the syringe pump with medication to last the next 24 hours. They will also check that the site is comfortable and that you do not require any other medications for any new or worsening symptoms.

It is important that you do not interfere with your syringe pump at all.

If you have any questions about your syringe pump or anticipatory medications please contact 01206 890360.