

Palliative Care Patients

T34 Syringe Driver

Information for patients and carers

What is a syringe driver?

A syringe driver is a small, portable, battery operated device which administers medicine directly under the skin. Medication is pumped continuously over a 24 hour period.

A syringe driver consists of:

- The machine
- Syringe (which contains medication)
- Tubing with a soft, thin, plastic needle at the end
- Plastic locked box

The soft, plastic needle is inserted just under the skin on the chest, abdomen, top of the arm or top of the leg and once inserted, cannot be felt. Once inserted the needle can often stay in for several days before needing to be changed.

How will a syringe driver help?

The syringe driver is designed to give medication over 24 hours and is often used to control symptoms such as pain, vomiting and breathlessness, when there is difficulty swallowing tablets and/or to avoid multiple injections.

Each day the syringe driver will be checked by a nurse and a new syringe containing medication will be attached. Your symptoms will be regularly reviewed and your medication adjusted accordingly.

It is common for there to be more than one medication in the syringe at a time. There may also be times when more than one syringe driver is needed. Additional doses of medicines may be given if required. The length of time a syringe driver is needed is individual to each patient.

It is important that you let your doctor or nurse know if your symptoms are not controlled, or if new symptoms develop. Sometimes people use a syringe driver for a short time and are then able to take medication by mouth again.

How will a syringe driver affect daily routine?

The syringe driver should not restrict most day to day activities, but there are some things to consider/avoid:

Bathing:

- If the syringe driver gets wet it will not work, the needle site also needs to remain dry. Although there is a dressing applied over the needle site this is not waterproof, please seek advice if the dressing becomes wet or starts to lift from the skin.

Going out:

- The syringe driver can be carried in a bag.
- Advice from a doctor should be sought before driving.

Eating:

- There are no specific restrictions on what you can eat or drink, unless there are particular instructions from your doctor.

Heat:

- If the syringe driver were to become too warm, this can affect the medication in it; avoid putting it near extra heat sources such as a heat pad, hot water bottle, electric blanket, or in direct sunlight.
- If the syringe driver has been exposed to heat, i.e. accidental exposure to the sun, inform the nursing team as this can compromise the effectiveness of the medication.

Holidays:

- Professional nursing support would be required if planning to be away for more than 24 hours. District nursing teams outside the local area may be able to assist if planned in advance. Liaison with the local GP practice would be needed.

Clothes:

- There are no specific restrictions so long as the clothing does not impede access to the syringe driver and the needle site is easily accessed (e.g. loose clothing and, for example a cardigan would be easier to remove than a jumper).

Troubleshooting**Syringe driver alerts:**

The syringe driver is a very reliable machine. If there are any problems or faults an alarm will sound and there will be an LCD screen message displayed which will indicate what the problem is.

For example:

- Low battery
- Occlusion (twisted/kinked tubing)
- Syringe displacement
- Clouding or sediment in the syringe

In all cases the nursing teams are responsible for ensuring the syringe driver is working effectively. In hospital the syringe driver will be regularly checked and at home it will be checked daily.

However, if problems arise between nurse visits, contact your nursing team as soon as possible on the numbers they have provided. Please do not interfere with the line or pump, and do not press the buttons on the control panel. Please be aware that the nursing team will aim to be with you within two hours.

Damage - A syringe driver in its protective box is quite strong, but if it were to be dropped or crushed please inform the nursing team who can ensure it is still working, or replace it if not.

Things to look out for:

The needle can remain in place for up to 7 days, however if the skin around the needle becomes red, swollen or painful, the nursing team need to be notified and they will arrange to remove the needle and replace it with a new one in a new site.

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