

# Syringe driver

Information and advice for patients

## *Palliative care*

### **What is a syringe driver?**

A syringe driver is a portable battery-operated pump with a syringe containing medication. It allows the medication to be delivered at a regular rate over 24 hours and is small enough to be carried in a pouch attached to a belt, a shoulder holster or large pocket.

### **What are the benefits of a syringe driver?**

The benefits of a syringe driver are:

- It avoids you needing to have regular injections and is a much more comfortable way to receive your medication.
- It can give you your medications continuously over 24 hours to ensure you are receiving the correct dose of medication over the correct period of time.
- A number of medicines can be mixed and given through the syringe driver together.
- It can give you medicines that cannot be given by another route.
- The pump is portable, convenient and light to wear.

Syringe drivers are beneficial for the following people:

- Those who find it difficult to swallow their medication in tablet or syrup form.
- Those who feel sick or vomit frequently which means they can't keep their tablets in their stomach long enough for them to work.
- People with symptoms that are difficult to control by tablets alone.

### **What are the risks of having a syringe driver?**

The risks of having a syringe driver are:

- Sometimes people become psychologically dependent upon the pump.
- Inflammation or infection can occasionally occur at the needle site which can affect how well the medicines are absorbed and can cause some discomfort.

### **What are the risks of not using the syringe driver?**

If you are offered a syringe driver because your doctor/nurse feels it is the most appropriate method of you receiving your medication and you choose not to use it your symptoms might not get better and you may need to have regular injections (every 2-4 hours).

### **Are there any alternatives to using a syringe driver?**

There may be alternatives available depending on your symptoms and condition and these will be discussed with you by the doctor and/or nurses so that you can make an informed decision.

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#### **Before using a syringe driver**

Before you start using your syringe driver the nurse will explain how it works to you and your carers and will answer any questions you may have about it.

#### **Using a syringe driver**

The syringe in the syringe driver is attached to a thin piece of tubing which has a fine needle attached at the other end. The nurse will insert this needle just under the skin on your chest, tummy or the top of your arm or leg, and will secure it in place with a clear dressing. He/she will fill the syringe with the correct medication and will set the rate that the syringe driver administers this. Do not alter the rate or press the boost button on the driver.

Once the needle is in place you should not feel it at all and it can stay there for a few days. The syringe driver should not be placed above the height of the needle site. Please do not disturb the dressing that has been placed over the needle.

The nurse looking after you will refill your syringe once everyday. If you are at home, a district nurse will come to your home to do this. At the same time they will:

- check that your machine is working properly;
- check that the needle site is not painful, leaking, red or swollen;
- replace the needle in a different part of the body every few days;
- record of the amount of each medication in your home.

#### **Alarms on the syringe driver**

There is an alarm on the syringe driver that will bleep if there is a problem. The alarm usually sounds because there is a blockage to the flow of medication caused by a kink in the long tubing or the syringe is empty. If the alarm bleeps please contact your nurse.

#### **Sleeping**

Some people find it useful to tuck the syringe driver under their pillow at night to keep it from falling out of bed.

#### **Bathing and showering**

Do not immerse the syringe driver in water. You can have a bath or shower but try to keep the needle site dry and keep the machine out of the water by putting it on a stool out of the water.

If the syringe driver is accidentally immersed in water or contaminated by fluids in any way contact your nurse immediately as she/he will need to bring you a new syringe driver and return the other for inspection.

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### **Moving around with and storing your syringe driver**

Take care when moving around with the syringe driver, use the holster provided or put it in a pocket. The syringe contents must be kept out of direct sunlight and must not become too warm. Your nurse will be able to advise you on the best place to keep your syringe driver.

Keep all medicines out of reach of children, preferably in a locked cupboard.

### **How long will I need the syringe driver for?**

You may only need to use a syringe driver for a few days or weeks. The nurse looking after you will give more detail about the amount of time you may need it for.

### **Storing medicines for your syringe driver at home**

- Some of the medicines used in the syringe driver contain powerful pain-relieving agents which can seriously harm people they have not been prescribed for. Therefore it is very important that no one else takes or has access to your medication and that you only use them as prescribed.
- Store the medicines in their original packaging.
- Make sure they are all stored together in a cool, dry place.
- Store the medicines safely out of the sight and reach of children. It is not safe to keep them in an easily accessible fridge, cupboard, drawer, bedside cabinet or wardrobe etc.

### **Disposing of medicines**

Any medicines that are no longer needed should be taken to your local pharmacy for safe disposal as soon as possible. If you are unable to do this, please speak to one of your nursing team who may be able to make alternative arrangements.

### **When to contact your nurse**

Please contact your nurse if:

- the needle comes out
  - the dressing becomes loose
  - you have any concerns about your syringe driver or medication
  - the alarm on the syringe driver beeps
  - the syringe driver is dropped
  - you have any soreness, redness, irritation or swelling at the needle site
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### Contact details

If you are in hospital and have any questions or concerns about your syringe driver, please contact the Palliative Care team on one of the following numbers, or ask a member of staff to contact them for you:

#### Palliative Care Team

Sandwell Hospital: 0121 507 2511

City Hospital: 0121 507 5296

If you are at home and have any questions or concerns about your syringe driver please contact your district nurse:

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### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- 'The Syringe Driver', 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 2005
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- Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, device bulletin 2003, 'Infusion systems', November 2010
- 'Subcutaneous drug infusion: a review of problems and solutions', International Journal of Palliative Nursing volume 7 (issue 2), February 2001
- 'Symptom Management in Advanced Cancer', 4th edition, Twycross, Wilcock and Stark-Troller, 2009

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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