



Administering  
self-injected medications

*Walgreens*



# Table of contents

<b>How to properly administer medications requiring self-injection .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Step 1: Setting up your medication.....	2
Step 2: Preparing to give your injection .....	3
Step 3: Administering your injection .....	4
Step 4: Disposing of used needles and syringes .....	6
References.....	8
Resources .....	9

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# How to properly administer medications requiring self-injection

This information is intended to be used as a four-step reference for administering your injectable medication.

Your clinicians at your doctor's office or those associated with the manufacturer of your medication may offer free, one-on-one injection training. Be sure to ask. Training should include an overview of the skills necessary to carry out your injections at the doctor's office or at your home or office. In case your clinicians do not offer these services, ask them if they can direct you elsewhere. Receiving injection training can help you manage your treatment, especially as you first start giving your injections.

For your reference, we have included an overview of the four steps required for self-injection.

If you are giving your injection with an injection device, always refer to the medication guide, package insert or website for injection instructions specific to the device. Also be sure to follow the directions about your medication's specific storage, preparation and administration provided in the medication guide or package insert.

**These steps are general, self-injection principles that are intended to be used as a supplement to your injection training with a clinician.**

- Step 1:** Setting up your medication
- Step 2:** Preparing to give your injection
- Step 3:** Administering your injection
- Step 4:** Disposing of used needles and syringes





## Step 1: Setting up your medication



### Wash your hands

It is important to begin by washing your hands thoroughly to prevent infection. A thorough hand-washing includes scrubbing the backs of hands, fingertips, thumbs, under the fingernails and between fingers.

The following steps take you through the hand-washing process with soap and water:

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water.
2. Put soap on your hands.
3. Place water and soap on all areas of the hands.
4. Rub hands back and forth.
5. Keep rubbing hands for about 15 to 20 seconds — the same amount of time it takes to sing the “Happy Birthday” song twice.
6. Rinse soap off hands.
7. Before turning off the water, dry hands using a paper towel or air dryer. Then, use a paper towel to turn off the faucet.

Washing with soap and water is the most effective way to remove dirt. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer and follow these steps:

1. Put a dime-sized amount of the sanitizer on the palm of one hand.

2. Rub hands together.
3. Cover all areas on the hands.
4. Keep rubbing hands together until hands are dry.

### Prepare your medication and syringe

1. If your medication is stored in the refrigerator, remove it from the refrigerator about 30 minutes before you plan to inject so it can warm up to room temperature. Do not shake your medication or roll it between your hands, as this may make the medication less effective.
2. Find a clean, dry surface — perhaps a bathroom or kitchen counter or table. Wipe the area with an antibacterial cloth or put down a clean paper towel before laying out your injection supplies. This might include alcohol wipes, gauze, a syringe and a needle. **Never** reuse syringes or needles.
3. It is important that you understand and follow directions for the preparation and administration of your medication contained within the medication guide or package insert.
  - Your medication may be in a prefilled syringe that does not require mixing. If you are using a prefilled syringe, you may not need to prime the syringe. It is important to check for air bubbles and to see if the level of the medication is at the top of the needle.
  - If you need to prime the syringe to remove all the air from it, hold the syringe pointing upward, and gently tap the sides to force any air bubbles to the top. Push the plunger slowly until you see one or two drops come out from the tip of the needle. This ensures that all air is out.

- If your medication preparation requires mixing diluent (liquid) with dry powder, follow the directions as specified in the medication guide or package insert.
- For pen devices, refer to the medication guide or package insert or website from the manufacturer for injection instructions specific to the device, as each one is different.

4. Inspect your medications.
  - Check to make sure your medication has not expired.
  - See if the medication is cloudy or discolored (usually yellow).
  - Look for any particles floating in the medication vial.
  - Contact your doctor or pharmacy if there are any of the above medication problems.



## Step 2: Preparing to give your injection

### Injection site

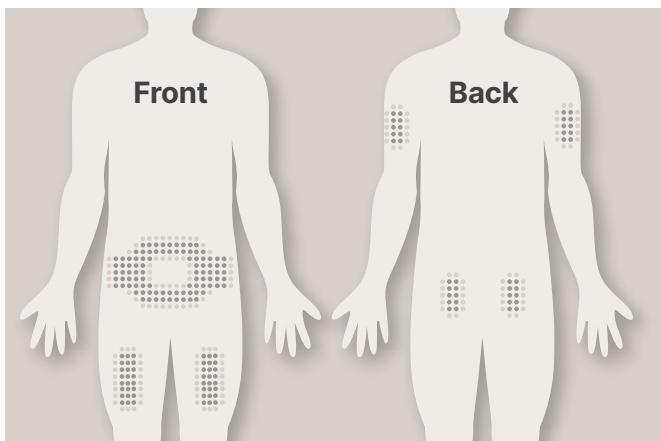
Your doctor will tell you whether your medication is injected into subcutaneous tissue or intramuscular tissue.

- A **subcutaneous injection** places medication into the fatty tissue directly beneath the skin using a short injection needle. Injection sites typically include the outer surface of upper arm, abdomen except belly button area or waistline, the top of and outer part of thigh. Buttocks can be used if appropriate (See Figure 1).
- An **intramuscular injection** places medication into deep muscle tissue using an injection needle longer than those used

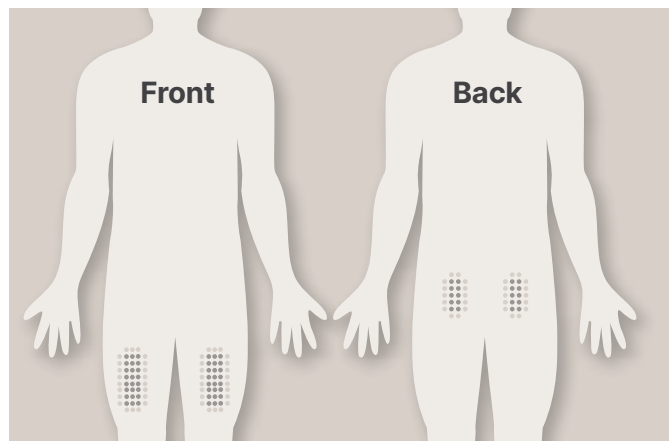
for subcutaneous injections. Injection sites typically include the mid-thigh or upper, outer quadrant of the buttocks (See Figure 2).

- Prior to giving the injection, clean the injection site with an alcohol wipe starting at the puncture site, using firm pressure and working your way outward in a circular motion. Let the alcohol dry for a few seconds. Do not fan it dry.
- It is recommended that you alternate injection sites when appropriate each time you give an injection. Keeping a written record of your injection locations might be helpful in recalling where you injected last. Check with your doctor regarding recommended and approved injection sites for your specific medications.

**Figure 1. Body sites for subcutaneous injection**



**Figure 2. Body sites for intramuscular injection**





## Step 3: Administering your injection

### Subcutaneous injection

Selecting an area for a subcutaneous injection will depend on directions from your doctor and your medication's instructions. You should choose a different site for each new injection. Rotate your injection site as recommended by the manufacturer. The site you choose for your first injection does not matter, as long as the initial site is in an appropriate area (See Step 2). Figure 3 shows a common site used for subcutaneous injection.

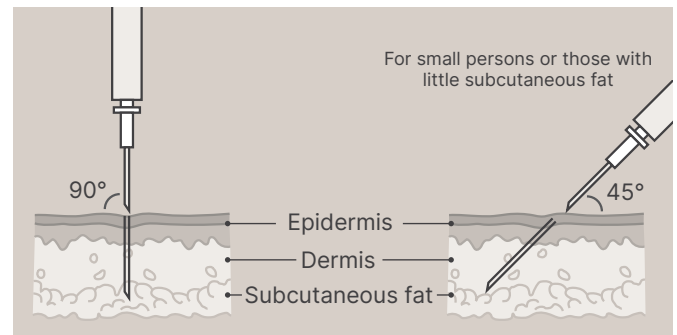
1. Remove the needle cover, being careful not to touch the needle. Hold the syringe as you would a pencil.
2. With your free hand, gently pinch the skin at the injection site. You should be pinching 1 to 2 inches of skin (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Example of subcutaneous injection**



3. Hold the needle at a 90-degree angle to the skin. Small children and persons with very little subcutaneous fat might be taught to use a 45-degree angle (See Figure 4). If inserting the needle at a 45-degree angle, make sure the opening of the needle is facing up while the point enters the skin first. Insert the needle using a quick motion. A slow, gentle push will cause more pain.

**Figure 4. Angle of needle insertion for subcutaneous injection**



## Intramuscular injection

Choosing an area for an intramuscular injection will depend on directions from your doctor and your medication's instructions. Check with your doctor or nurse if you have questions.

1. Remove the needle cover, being careful not to touch the needle. Hold the syringe as you would a pencil.
2. With your thumb and index finger of your free hand, stretch the skin of the injection site slightly. Try to relax the muscle you will be injecting, as injecting into a tense muscle will be more painful.
3. Holding the syringe straight up at a 90-degree angle from the injection site, insert the needle using a quick motion. A slow, gentle push will cause more pain (See Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Example of intramuscular injection**



Your next steps will depend on whether or not your doctor instructed you to pull back on the plunger before giving the injection. See options A and B below.

- A. If you were **not** instructed to pull back on the plunger, **or** if you were instructed to do so **and** no blood enters the syringe:
  4. Inject the medication by gently pushing down on the plunger until the syringe is empty.
  5. Remove the needle gently but quickly, and apply pressure to the injection site with a gauze pad.
  6. Apply a bandage if necessary.
- B. If you were instructed to pull back on the plunger **and** blood enters the syringe (this does not happen often):
  7. Do **not** give the injection.
  8. Remove the needle gently but quickly, and apply pressure to the injection site with a gauze pad. Apply a bandage if necessary.
  9. Dispose of the needle and syringe as instructed.
  10. Prepare another injection. Begin the entire process again, from page 4 for a subcutaneous injection or for an intramuscular injection.

**Note: Your doctor or some medication instructions may direct you to replace the needle only before proceeding.**



## Step 4: Disposing of used needles and syringes

Safely disposing used needles and syringes is always important — at home, work, school or on the road traveling. It is your responsibility to properly dispose of used needles and syringes in a puncture-resistant sharps disposal container (See Figure 6). You can obtain a sharps container from Walgreens at any time, ask on your next refill call.

You can take steps to keep the disposal process safe:

1. Keep the puncture-resistant sharps container out of the reach of children or animals. Getting stuck with a used needle or coming in contact with a used syringe can cause a number of problems, including:
  - The spread of bacterial or viral infections and diseases like HIV/AIDS, syphilis, hepatitis and tetanus
  - Emotional trauma and worry about potential illnesses
  - Unexpected medical expenses to cover the cost of testing for potential illnesses and treatment
2. When the puncture-resistant sharps container is about two-thirds full, securely tape the lid shut. You can request another sharps container from Walgreens at any time.
3. Dispose of all puncture-resistant sharps disposal containers in designated areas in your community, such as:
  - Drop-off collection sites
  - Household “hazardous waste centers”
  - Residential “special waste pickup services”
  - Syringe exchange programs
  - Mail-back services
  - Home needle destruction services
4. Practice safe needle use and disposal:
  - Never reuse needles or recap needles on a syringe.
  - Do not throw loose needles or syringes in the garbage.
  - Never flush loose needles or syringes down the toilet.
  - Do not place loose needles or syringes in recycling bins or containers.

**Figure 6. Puncture-resistant sharps disposal container**





We provide this information because the more you know about administering self-injected medications — the better you'll be able to manage it.

Additionally, the Walgreens Specialty360 Therapy Team is here to support you with **dependable, personalized service** to help manage your medication side effects and stay on track with your prescribed therapy.

We look forward to being a member of your healthcare team and helping you get the best results from your treatment.

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Walgreens provides specialty pharmacy services and support for patients who are taking medications that treat chronic, long-term conditions. Our dedicated Care Team — including pharmacists and patient care advocates — understand your specialty medications and how to take them. We help you stay on track with your therapy by delivering your medication on time, coordinating your refills and bringing you peace of mind. For more information, call 855-244-2555 or visit **Walgreens.com**.

## References

The following sources were used in the development of this booklet.

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Specialty Pharmacy  
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Walgreens specialty pharmacy locations maintain URAC accreditation.

# Resources

You might find it helpful to contact these organizations for additional support and resources.\*

For more information about needle and syringe disposal rules and programs in your state, talk to your doctor, local public health department or one of the following organizations:\*

**Environmental Protection Agency**

[www.epa.gov/rcra/medical-waste#sharps](http://www.epa.gov/rcra/medical-waste#sharps)

**SafeNeedleDisposal.org**

[www.safeneedledisposal.org](http://www.safeneedledisposal.org)

800-643-1643

[www.facebook.com/safeneedledisposal](http://www.facebook.com/safeneedledisposal)

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