



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Your syringe driver

Information for patients, relatives and carers

What is a syringe driver?

A syringe driver is a small portable machine that is able to give you certain medications constantly over 24 hours via a small needle inserted under your skin into the subcutaneous (fatty) tissue. The syringe driver is commenced with the aim to give you relief from symptoms such as pain, nausea, vomiting, breathlessness, chest secretions, restlessness and anxiety.



McKinley T34 syringe driver

Why do people have one?

- If you are finding it difficult to swallow tablets.
- If you are feeling sick/vomiting.
- If you are sleeping most of the time.
- If you are finding it difficult to cope with the amount of tablets that you need to take each day to help your symptoms
- To enable adjustment of your medications quickly to get your symptoms under control as soon as possible.

What are the advantages?

- Your symptoms may improve by giving medications at a constant rate.
- As an alternative to taking medications orally (if you have difficulty swallowing).
- Several medications for different symptoms can be put together in the same syringe driver.
- The syringe only needs to be changed by nursing staff every 24 hours (unless there has been a change in the medications).

- You don't need to have multiple injections.
- They are portable machines.
- Can be used at any time during your illness.

Will I be aware of it?

The syringe driver itself is fairly small (only slightly bigger than a pencil case), is lightweight and portable and it makes very little noise while it is running. It is easy to set up, comfortable and painless. Small bags are sometimes available which the pump can be put into to make it easier to carry around. The syringe driver does have an alarm which will sound when the medication in the syringe is about to finish or if there is a problem with the driver. While in hospital the nurses will regularly check the driver and the site where the needle is and will be able to deal with any problems to ensure that it is running properly.

Can I go home with one?

Yes, people can go home with a syringe driver. Your General Practitioner (GP) will continue to prescribe the medication you need in the driver once you are at home and the district nurses will continue to renew and look after this. The drivers are pre-set to deliver the medication over 24 hours; you cannot deliver the medications more quickly or give additional doses. If you need a change in the medication because your symptoms are not controlled, or if you are having side effects from the medication, then your GP or district nurse will organise this.

Some do's and don'ts

- ✓ **Do** tell the ward nurse (or district nurse if you are at home) if your skin is sore or red where the needle is placed.
- ✓ **Do** tell the ward nurse (or district nurse if you are at home) if the needle comes out, the alarm is sounding or if you have any worries about the driver or medication.

- ✓ **Do** tell the ward nurse (or district nurse if you are at home) straight away if you have accidentally dropped the driver.
- ✓ **Do** (if you are at home) keep medication in a safe place (and out of reach of children or vulnerable adults).
- ✗ **Don't** get the driver wet – do not take a bath or shower while connected to the machine. Please speak to the ward nurse (or district nurse if you are at home) for advice. If the driver does get wet at all, please inform the ward nurse immediately (or if you are at home, please contact the district nurse).
- ✗ **Don't** share your medication with friends or relatives.

Contact your nurse/district nurse/out of hours doctor if:

- You are worried that the syringe driver is not working properly or has been damaged.
- The colour of the medicines has changed or become cloudy.
- The skin around the needle/tube is red, swollen or painful.
- The alarm sounds.
- You have other concerns.

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request. Please contact us on 0118 322 7826 or email palliative.care@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

For more information about the Trust please visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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