

Heparin (low molecular weight heparin)

Instructions for daily injections of heparin:

1. Lie down.
2. Gently pinch a large fold of skin on your tummy (or the outside of your thigh, if you prefer) into a fold between your thumb and forefinger. Hold the fold like this while you are injecting.
3. Inject straight down into this skin fold, not at an angle.
4. Don't try to push out any air in the syringe before injecting yourself – the pre-filled syringe is ready to use immediately.

Please be aware that heparin tends to thin your bones and may also give you some bruising.

There is a very rare side effect that is very serious. If you get a skin reaction (not just bruising) where you inject, or your arms or legs become swollen, painful or weak, let your doctor know as soon as possible and mention you are on heparin.

What is heparin?

Heparin is a blood-thinning treatment that doesn't harm your baby.

When you cut yourself you bleed. After a while the blood starts to clot and you stop bleeding. The cut has triggered the clotting cascade, a set of reactions in your blood that leads to clotting to stop the bleeding. Heparin blocks the clotting cascade and so makes it more difficult to clot (thins your blood). It also seems to help a pregnancy implant in the womb.

What is low molecular weight heparin?

Two types of heparins are commonly used – unfractionated heparin (UFH) and low molecular weight heparins (LMWHs). LMWH doesn't need monitoring (unless you have previously had UFH, and doesn't cross the placenta to your baby).

You give yourself daily injections of LMWH, using pre-filled syringes.

What are the side-effects?

- If you follow the instructions above about injecting heparin, you shouldn't have much bruising.
- About 1 out of 56 people (1.8%) develop a skin allergy to heparin.
- Prolonged use of heparin tends to cause osteoporosis (thinning of your bones) and fractures. The risk is very slight in women on LMWH just during pregnancy, with fractures occurring in only about 1 out of 2,500 women (0.04%).
- Heparin causes significant bleeding during pregnancy or delivery in fewer than 1 out of 50 women (2%).
- There is one very serious reaction to treatment, Heparin Induced Thrombocytopenia (HIT), where blood platelet levels fall sharply, generally in the first two weeks of treatment. Untreated HIT would cause severe clotting which could be fatal. However, a study of almost 3,000 women on LMWH only during pregnancy found nobody developed HIT, so monitoring is not advised unless you have previously had unfractionated heparin.
- Nevertheless, if you get a skin reaction other than bruising at the injection site, or your arms or legs become swollen, painful or weak, let your doctor know as soon as possible and mention that you are on low molecular weight heparin.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your investigation please call the Fertility Clinic and ask to talk to one of the nurses.

0118 322 7286

The clinic doctors produce a number of information sheets especially for this clinic and update them frequently. You can find some of these sheets on www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets/ and search under 'F' for Fertility Clinic.

For more information about the Trust visit our website: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Fertility Clinic, October 2018
Review due: October 2020