

# Your guide to self-injectable medications

Taking medication at home can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially when it involves giving yourself a shot. However, learning to self-inject can put you in control of your own health and well-being.

The following guide is intended to be used as a supplement to your physician's injection training. If you have questions or need further assistance, don't hesitate to contact our Community Health Workers at (855) 610-6807.

## What are the types of injections?

Injections, also known as shots, deliver medication using a needle directly into your body. These two injection types can be self-administered by yourself or with the help of a friend or family member.

### Subcutaneous (SQ) injections

With this type of injection, medication is administered into the fatty tissue just under the skin. These injections use short, thin needles and aren't likely to cause discomfort.

### Intramuscular (IM) injections

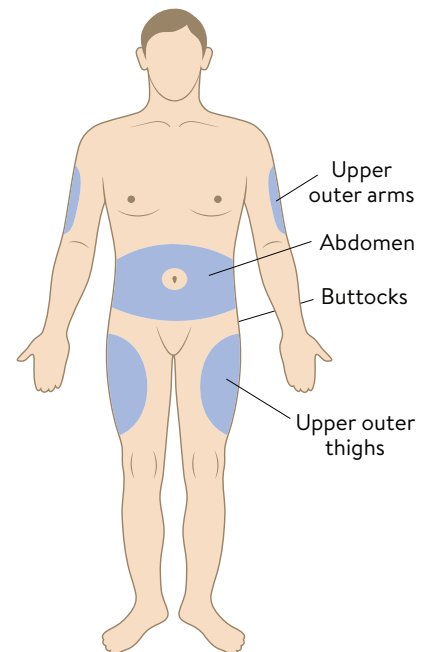
Medication is administered deep into the muscle, allowing it to be absorbed quickly. These injections require a longer, wider needle and may cause temporary discomfort.

Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will help you determine the best place for your injection. There are four common injection sites: upper outer arms, abdomen, buttocks and upper outer thighs.

## How to self-inject your medication

Before giving yourself an injection, read all of the instructions below.

1. Choose a place and a time to administer your medication. Make sure the area you pick is clean, dry and clutter free and your sharps disposal container is nearby.
2. To prevent infection, wash your hands by rubbing vigorously for 15-20 seconds with soap and water.
3. Gather your supplies and read the instructions on the medication guide.
  - Check the appearance of the medication and be sure it matches the description provided by the manufacturer.
  - Check the expiration date of the medication.
  - Follow the manufacturer's guidelines, as some medications must be at room temperature before use.
4. Pick the location on your body to inject.
  - Avoid areas that are red, bruised, irritated, hardened, scarred, or have stretch marks or lumps.
  - Be sure to rotate the injection site each time so your skin remains healthy. DO NOT use the same injection site every time.





- If you choose the lower stomach area, make sure you're two inches away from your belly button.
  - Do not inject through clothing.
5. Clean and prepare the site.
    - If your doctor instructs you on how to prepare the site, follow their instructions.
    - If no instruction is given, use an alcohol swab to clean a two-inch area around the site.
    - Begin at the center where you plan to inject and move outward in a circular movement.
    - Allow the area to dry to avoid stinging during the injection.
  6. If using a prefilled syringe, remove the cap and hold the syringe in your dominant hand. *If you need to fill a syringe, skip to step 9.*
  7. **SQ injection:** If unsure about the best place for your subcutaneous injection, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Then follow these steps:
    - a. With your free hand, squeeze the area of skin you've cleaned and hold it firmly until the injection is complete. This helps prevent the medication from entering the muscle.
    - b. Syringes can be held like you would a pencil. A prefilled pen may be held upright with your thumb above **but not on** the plunger. Hold the pen or syringe at a 90-degree angle to the skin. If you're administering to a child or have very little subcutaneous fat, you may be instructed to use a 45-degree angle.
    - c. Insert the needle using a quick, smooth motion. A slow, gentle push will cause more discomfort.
    - d. After the injection is complete, wait briefly, count to three, then remove the syringe at the same angle it was inserted. Do not rub the area, but if needed, apply pressure with a cotton ball if bleeding occurs. If bleeding continues after five seconds, cover with a bandage.
    - e. Immediately discard the syringe or pen into a sharps bin or another hard container with a secure lid.
    - f. Wash your hands when you're done.
    - g. Check the site for signs of redness, swelling or tenderness two hours after injection. If any of these occur, report this to your pharmacist or doctor.
  8. **IM injection:** Discuss the proper place to self-administer your intramuscular injection with your doctor, then follow these steps:
    - a. Syringes can be held like you would a pencil. A prefilled pen may be held upright with your thumb above but not on the plunger. Hold the pen or syringe at a 90-degree angle to the skin with your dominant hand.
    - b. With your thumb and index finger of your free hand, stretch the area of skin you've cleaned and hold it until the injection is complete. Try to relax the muscle you'll be injecting to prevent discomfort. While continuing to hold the pen or syringe at a 90-degree angle to the skin, insert the needle using a quick, smooth motion. A slow, gentle push will cause more discomfort.
    - c. Your next step will depend on instructions from your doctor. If using a pen device or a needle that does not require aspiration, skip to step 8f.



- d. If the doctor instructed you to pull back on the plunger of the syringe (aspiration) and blood enters the syringe, DO NOT give the injection. Remove the needle gently, quickly discard it into your sharps container and apply pressure with a cotton ball or gauze pad.
  - e. Prepare another syringe for injection and begin the process again with a different injection site.
  - f. After your injection is complete, wait briefly, count to three, then remove the syringe at the same angle it was inserted. Do not rub the area, but if needed, apply pressure with a cotton ball if bleeding occurs. If bleeding continues after five seconds, cover it with a bandage.
  - g. Immediately discard the syringe or pen into a sharps bin or another hard container with a secure lid.
  - h. Wash your hands when you're done.
  - i. Check the site for signs of redness, swelling or tenderness two hours after injection. If one of these occurs, report this to your pharmacist or doctor.
9. **Filling the syringe with a vial:** If you need to fill the syringe from a vial, review the following steps:
- a. Wipe the top of the bottle with an alcohol wipe. Let it dry. Do not blow on it. Take the cap off the needle, being careful not to touch the needle to keep it sterile. Pull back the plunger of the syringe to put as much air in the syringe as the dose of medicine you want. For example, if you need to draw 1 cc/ml of medicine, pull the plunger back to the 1 cc/ml mark. Push the needle through the rubber top of the bottle. Push the plunger so the air goes into the bottle. Without removing the needle, turn the bottle upside down. With the tip of the needle in the liquid, pull back on the plunger to get the correct dose into the syringe.
  - b. Check the syringe for air bubbles. If there are bubbles, hold both the bottle and syringe in one hand, and tap the syringe with your other hand. The bubbles will float to the top. Push the bubbles back into the bottle, then pull back on the plunger to get the correct dose.
  - c. When there are no bubbles, take the syringe out of the bottle. Put the syringe down carefully so the needle does not touch anything.
  - d. Continue with steps 7a-g if you're giving yourself an SQ injection or steps 8a-i if it's an IM injection.

Mark your calendar for your next dose and remember to keep track of your symptoms. Talk to your doctor and pharmacist at your next appointment to let them know if your medications need to be adjusted.

