



# Heparin

A patient's guide



University Health Care  
Thrombosis Service

## What is heparin?

Heparin is a shot that helps keep harmful blood clots from forming.

You may have a blood clot or be in danger of getting one. Blood clots can be harmful if they block blood vessels. You can get clots in your veins, arteries, heart valves, or heart.

Heparin may be used if:

- You can't move around easily or very much
- You have knee replacement surgery
- You have hip replacement surgery
- You have a blood clot in the leg (deep vein thrombosis or DVT)
- You have a blood clot in the lungs (pulmonary embolism or PE)
- You have belly surgery

## How should I use heparin?

Heparin is a shot given up to three times a day. You should follow your doctor's exact instructions for how long to continue using heparin.

## How do I draw up a dose of medicine?

- 1.** Remove lid from medicine vial. Wipe top of vial with alcohol swab and let it dry. (*Figure A*)
- 2.** Remove cap from syringe. Pull syringe plunger until the rubber end of the plunger is at the mark for how much medicine you need. Put needle into the center of the vial, through rubber seal. (*Figures B and C*)

- 3.** Push the plunger until all the air in the syringe is in the vial. Keep the needle inside the vial. Use one hand to hold the syringe and the other to hold the bottle. Turn the bottle upside down. (*Figure D*)

- 4.** Keep the tip of the needle inside the liquid in the vial.

- 5.** Pull back on the plunger until you have the amount of medicine you need. (*Figure E*)

- 6.** Keep the vial, with the needle inside, turned upside down. Tap the side of the syringe lightly with your hand and any air bubbles will move toward the needle. Push on the plunger until any air in the syringe is gone. Check that you still have the amount of medicine you need. If not, pull back on the plunger until you do have the right amount of medicine. Check again that there is no air in the syringe. (*Figure F*)

- 7.** When there is no air in the syringe and you have the right amount of medicine, pull the needle out of the vial. The syringe is now ready for you to give the shot.

## How do I give myself the shot?

Please make sure you are given the pamphlet named "How to Give Yourself a Shot." Follow the instructions in the pamphlet.

## Side effects:

You may get pain, redness, bruising, or swelling where the shot is given.

## Bleeding

The most common side effect of blood thinning medication is bleeding.

Some bleeding is minor, like:

- Bleeding gums when brushing your teeth
- Small nose bleeds that stop right away
- Easy bruising
- Longer or heavier menstrual periods

Most of the time you do not need to see your health care provider for minor bleeding. If you are ever worried that your bleeding is serious or are concerned you should call your provider.

Some bleeding is major, like:

- Red or bloody urine
- Black, red, or tarry (look like tar) stools
- Throwing up or coughing up blood
- Severe headaches
- New pain or swelling

If you have major bleeding seek medical help right away.

## Blood clots

It is still possible to get a blood clot while you are on blood thinners.

Symptoms of a blood clot are any of these things:

- New or sudden increase in warmth, pain, or swelling in your arms or legs
- Difficulty breathing or sudden increase in shortness of breath
- Chest pain, discomfort, or tightness
- Weakness, numbness, or tingling in your arms or legs



## How should I store my heparin?

Store your syringes and medicine at room temperature and keep them away from moisture, light, and away from children and animals. Put them in a place where they cannot get broken.

## Tell your provider:

- If you are allergic to heparin or products made from pork.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, have kidney disease, liver disease, or any bleeding disorder.
- If you usually take aspirin. You should not take aspirin with heparin unless your provider says it is okay.
- About any changes in the medicines you take, including over the counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal products.
- About any changes in your health that you are concerned about.
- Make sure all your providers (dentist, pharmacist, doctor, etc.) know you are taking heparin.

## What should I do if I give myself too much medicine or if I miss a dose?

- Call your provider immediately even if you don't feel any different.
- If you forget to take your medication, take it as soon as you remember and call your provider and ask when you should take your next shot. If you can't reach your provider right away, take your next shot 8 or 12 hours from when you had it last, depending on how often you have been giving yourself the shots. Do this until you get other instructions.

*Note: The term "provider" used in this brochure refers to the person who is taking care of you for your anticoagulation. This could be your doctor, your pharmacist, your nurse, etc.*

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[www.healthcare.utah.edu/thrombosis](http://www.healthcare.utah.edu/thrombosis)

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