

Patient and caregiver information sheet

Syringe Drivers

Background

- A syringe driver is a small, battery operated “infusion pump” that allows medications to be given continuously through a little plastic “butterfly needle” that goes just under the skin, into the subcutaneous tissue.
- Syringe drivers are used a lot in palliative care because they are safe and relatively easy to look after for patients who are at home. They can be particularly helpful when a person has difficulty taking medications by mouth.

Basic information about syringe drivers

- Syringe driver devices are very reliable
- It is normal for the syringe driver to make a “whirring” noise every few minutes. It should not be loud enough for others to hear or to keep you awake at night.
- It is normal for a green light to flash on the right hand side of the machine. If this light stops, the battery needs to be changed. It is a good idea to keep a spare 9 volt battery handy in case this happens.
- It is a good idea to check every now and then whether the machine is making its normal “whirring” sound, and that the light is flashing. Don’t worry about checking it overnight.
- The machine also has an alarm which is a constant piercing noise. Don’t panic if the alarm goes off - it means that the syringe is empty, or the tubing is blocked. Eventually the alarm turns itself off.

Carrying the syringe driver

- It is ok to get up and about with the syringe driver, and to go out
- Buying a belt bag or something similar to conceal the device and carry it around discreetly may be useful

Showering

- The syringe driver *must not* be immersed in water. It can also be damaged by steam.

Disconnection from the syringe driver

- It is possible to disconnect the driver for a little while, but it is not encouraged.
- You do not need to turn off the syringe driver if you need to disconnect for a little while. While you are disconnected you will not be receiving any medication through the device, but, as long as this is only a short time, it is unlikely to make your symptoms worse for that brief period.

- Once the syringe is replaced in the syringe driver, you will need to press the start/boost button to restart the infusion.

Extra pain or “breakthrough” of unrelieved symptoms

- If you still experience pain whilst you are on the syringe driver, extra “breakthrough medication” can still be given.

Troubleshooting

- If you are worried that something is wrong with your syringe driver, don't panic. Most technical problems that can happen are easy to fix.
- Check that the light on the right hand side of the device is flashing. If it isn't, try changing the battery, then press the button labelled “start/boost” and the light should begin to flash.
- If the alarm is sounding, the only way to stop the noise is to take the battery out. Then check:
 - Is there a kink in the tube? Try and untwist it
 - If the syringe has become disconnected from the machine, attach it again with the black strap. Replace the battery and press the “start” button to get it going again
 - If the syringe is empty, or the butterfly needle has come out, or if the skin around the butterfly needle seems swollen or painful, contact your doctor or palliative care team for help.