Using Insulin Pens

Insulin can be given using a syringe or a pen device. Some people find that a pen is easier to use than a syringe. Pens may cost more, so be sure to discuss this with your health care team. Use the pictures and steps listed below to learn how to use your pen.

**Parts of an Insulin Pen**

- Cap
- Outer pen needle cap
- Inner pen needle cap
- Pen needle
- Dose window
- Dial
- Pen end

**Where to Inject Insulin**

Injections are given into fatty tissue. The areas of fatty tissue are shaded on the right. Rotate your injection sites to prevent tissue damage. If tissue damage occurs, the insulin may not absorb as well. This can make it harder to manage blood sugars.

**Abdomen:** If using this site, do not use the area within one inch of your belly button. Avoid using the belt line area since rubbing may irritate the site. Avoid scars from surgery.

**Arms:** Use the back side of your upper arm in the fatty tissue. It can be hard to reach this area yourself. You can try pinching up the tissue by placing your arm over the back of a chair or brace it against a wall.

**Thighs:** Use middle and outer areas where you can pinch up tissue.

**Buttocks:** Use any area where you can pinch up tissue. This site is not often used since it is hard to reach.

**Steps for Using an Insulin Pen**

1. Wash your hands and be sure the injection site is clean.
2. Check the label on the pen to make sure you are using the correct type of insulin. (If using a mixed insulin, roll the pen between your hands 10 times. Then move it back and forth 10 times. This is important so that you get the right dose.)
3. Clean the rubber stopper on your pen by rubbing it with an alcohol wipe.
4. Remove the foil seal on the pen needle. Attach the pen needle to your pen by twisting it on the end of the pen until tight.
5. Pull off the outer pen needle cap and inner pen needle cap. Set aside.
6. Prime the pen by dialing in 2 units (or 5 units if using the U-500 pen). This is sometimes called the “air shot” test. Hold your pen with the needle pointing up. Push the end of your pen like a plunger to push out the insulin. You should see a drop of insulin at the needle tip. If not, repeat this step. (Do this priming step each time you attach a new needle.)
7. Turn the dial to the number of insulin units you need.
8. Inject the pen needle into your skin at a 90 degree angle as shown in the picture.
9. Push the plunger down all the way until dose reads “0”.

---

Health Facts for you
10. Wait 5-10 seconds before pulling the pen out of your skin.
11. Take the pen needle from your skin.
12. Unscrew and remove the pen needle.
13. Throw your used pen needle in a sharps box.

Pens do expire. Ask your nurse or pharmacist about this since it varies based on insulin type.

Source for all images: Media Solutions, UW School of Medicine and Public Health. Permission for use granted by the Wisconsin Diabetes Prevention and Control Program.

Reference

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7375