



SAFER INJECTION GUIDE

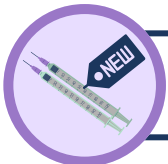
This guide offers easy-to-follow tips for before, during, and after injecting substances to reduce harm, protect your health, and help you care for your body.

Safer injection practices can prevent and reduce

- Transmission of bloodborne infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C
- Wounds or worsening of wounds
- Skin and other soft tissue infections
- Bacterial and fungal infections
- Overdose risk



Safe Injection Quick Facts!



Always use new supplies every time

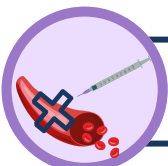


Don't share supplies

If you share drugs, divide the drug first using new unused supplies to stay safe.



Wash your hands before preparing your drugs or medications



Never inject into arteries

Injecting into arteries is very painful and dangerous. Arteries have a pulse where as veins do not. Avoid injecting where you feel a pulse.



Rotate injection spots to let your body heal before using it again



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Common Kit Supplies and Purpose

Alcohol Wipes

Clean your skin where you plan to inject keep bacteria other germs from entering your body.



Sterile Water

To break down drugs in powder, pill, or rock form you need water. Only use clean (sterile) water to avoid risk of infections.



Ascorbic acid

aka vitamin C

Helps certain drugs, like crack cocaine, dissolve in water. Only use a little to help reduce pain and vein damage.



Don't use lemon juice or vinegar—they can carry bacteria or fungus, and may damage veins or skin.

Cookers

Always use new, unused supplies to prepare your shot—this includes cookers.



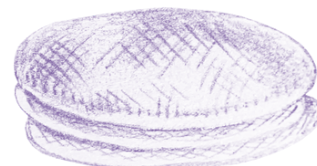
Twist Ties

You can use twist ties to hold a cooker to reduce the risk of burns.



Cotton Filters

Pull your drugs through cotton to remove solid pieces.



Using cigarette filters is unsafe as it may contain glass fibers that could hurt your body if injected.

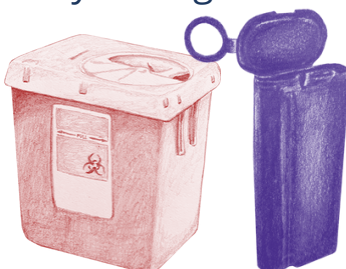
Torniquet/Tie

Use a tie on your arm to make it easier to find a vein. Take the tie off after putting the needle in but before injecting.



Sharps Container

Safely throw away your used needles in a sharp's container or in a strong, hard plastic container with a lid (e.g., a laundry detergent bottle).



Naloxone

commonly known as Narcan

Keep naloxone nearby. Make sure someone with you knows how to use it to reverse an opioid overdose.





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Preparing for Injection

- ✓ Find a safe, clean, and well-lit area.
- ✓ Place all injecting supplies on a clean surface and within reach.
- ✓ Wash your hands and clean the injection site before injecting.
- ✓ Always use new equipment (syringes, cookers, filters) every time and never share it.





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Tips for Intravenous Injecting

What Is Intravenous Injecting?

Intravenous injecting is when someone uses a needle to inject a substance directly into a vein.

Reminder: Veins are typically closer to the surface of the skin than arteries

Helpful Tips

- Avoid injecting into arteries or nerves
 - **Arteries** are located deeper in the body, under muscles, and are usually not visible on the surface of the skin.
- Gently massage or slap the vein
- Put hot washcloth over the vein
- Let arm or leg hang down
- Clench and re-clench the fist
- Windmill arm



Find a New Spot!

Try not to use the same spot for injections

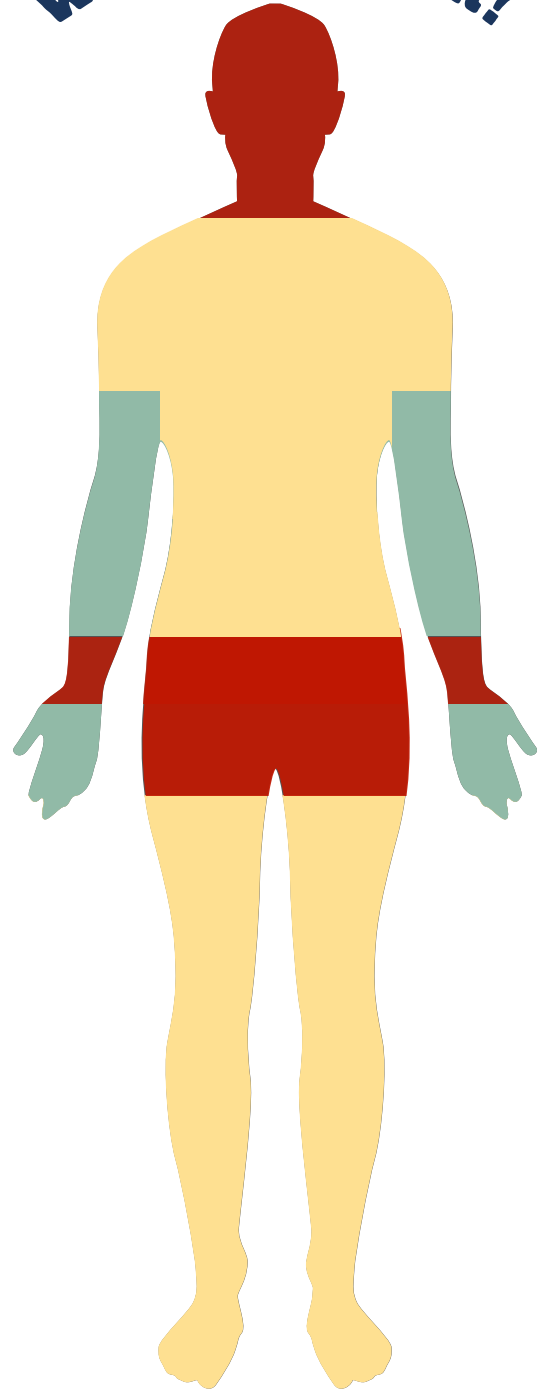
Reusing the same spot won't give the skin and veins time to heal which can cause serious infections and veins to leak, collapse, or scar.

Try rotating injection sites to promote healing between use of that site.

**SAFETY
FIRST**

Don't inject in or near a wound!

Where to Inject?



- Dangerous to inject here
- Avoid injecting here if possible
- Safest areas to inject



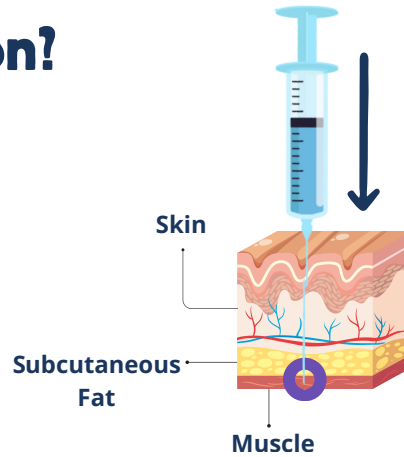
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Tips for injecting Intramuscular Injection

What Is a Intramuscular Injection?

Intramuscular injection involves injecting a substance into a muscle where it's absorbed into the bloodstream over time.

It's used when veins are hard to access or a slower effect is preferred, such as with naloxone (overdose reversal medication), vaccines, vitamin B12 or certain hormone treatments.



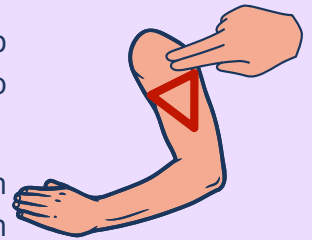
Hold the needle at 90 degrees and insert with a smooth motion

Locating The Spot!

Intramuscular injections are often done in the deltoid muscle of the arm or the muscle located on the side of the thigh.

Arm Injection

- Feel for the bone that's located at the top of your upper arm and then place two finger widths below that bone.
- At the bottom of the two fingers will be an upside-down triangle. Give the injection in the center of the triangle.

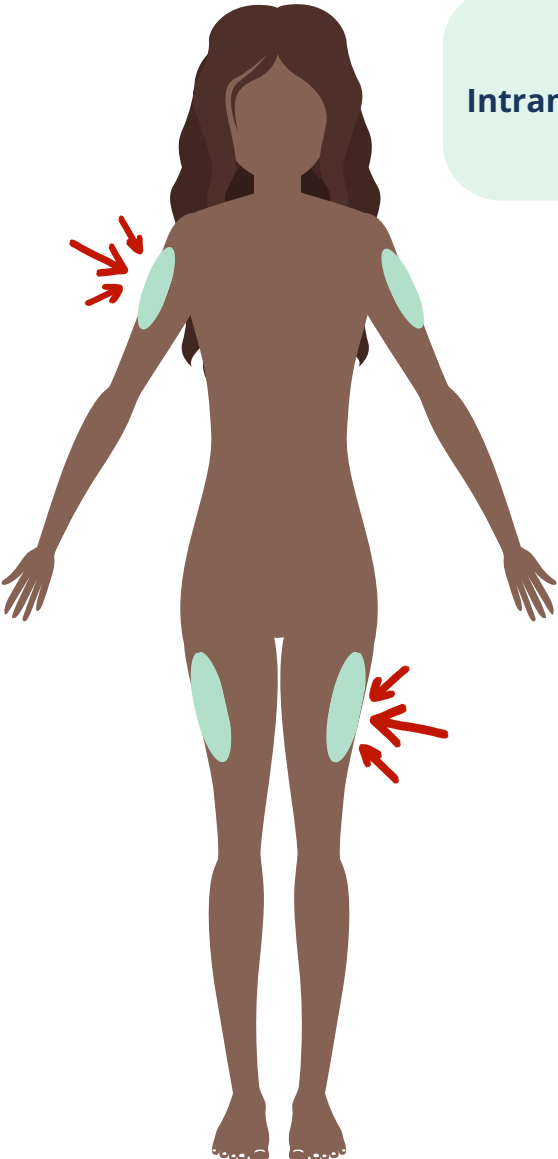
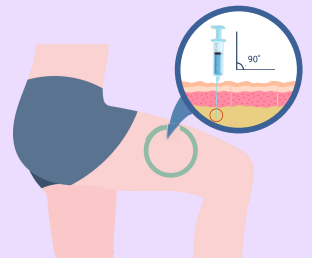


! This site can be difficult for self-injection because of its small muscle area. Help with injections here might be needed.

Thigh Injection

Aim for halfway between your knee and your hip on the outer part of the thigh!

- Place one hand above the knee and your other hand below the groin.
- The injection goes in the outer part of the thigh, anywhere in between your hands.





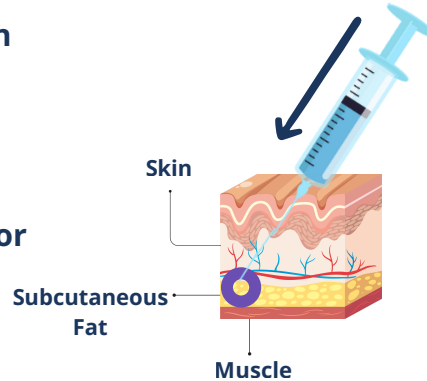
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Tips for injecting Subcutaneous Injection

What Is a Subcutaneous Injection?

Subcutaneous injection involves injecting a substance into the fat tissue underneath the skin where it's absorbed into the bloodstream over time.

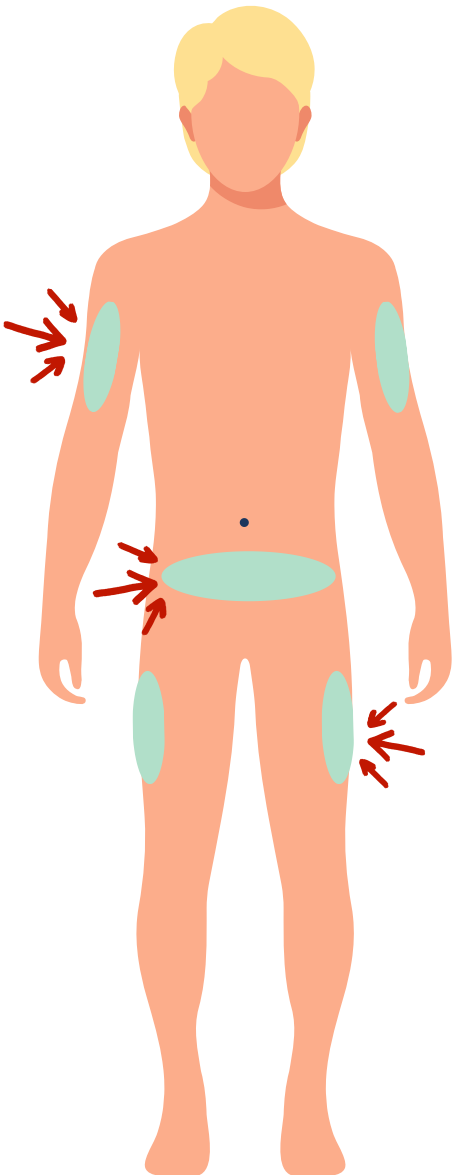
It's used for medicines that need to be absorbed slowly into the body. This method is often used for things like diabetes or weight loss medications, certain hormone treatments, and some medications for pain, nausea, or allergies.



Hold the needle halfway between straight up and flat against the skin. Think of the angle like a ramp or a slide. Then insert with a smooth motion.

Locating The Spot!

Subcutaneous injections are often used in the stomach, outer thighs, or upper arms.



Arm Injection

- At least 3 inches below your shoulder and 3 inches above your elbow, on the side or back of arm.



Stomach Injection

- Below your ribs and above your hip bones, at least 2 inches away from your belly button.

Thigh Injection

Aim for halfway between your knee and your hip on the outer part of the thigh!

- Place one hand above the knee and your other hand below the groin.
- The injection goes in the outer part of the thigh, anywhere in between your hands.





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Tips for injecting

Needle Gauges and Lengths

What You Need To Know About Gauges

- **Needle Gauge** refers to the size of hole in the needle. The bigger the gauge number the thinner the needle.
- Using thinner needles (higher gauge number) can result in less damage to the vein and skin, less opportunity for infection, and increased ability to hit smaller veins. Thinner needles are commonly used for intravenous or subcutaneous injection.
- Some medications like steroids, hormones, or thick oil-based drugs, are harder to push through a small needle. A thicker needle (lower gauge number) is often needed to make sure the medicine flows properly and gets into the muscle. Thicker needles are commonly used for intramuscular injection.

Common Gauge Sizes

**these are common sizes, use what feels best and safest for you.*

Intravenous Injections

- 27G Thicker
- 28G
- 29G
- 30G Thinner



Intramuscular Injections

- 23G Thicker
- 24G
- 25G Thinner



Subcutaneous Injections

- 28G Thicker
- 29G
- 30G
- 31G Thinner



What You Need To Know About Needle Lengths

- Needle length matters because it helps the substance reach the right spot, work properly, and lowers the risk of pain or damage to the skin, veins, or muscle.
- **Shorter needles** are commonly used for:
 - **Intravenous Injections** with a common needle length of 1/2 in, 5/16 in, or 8mm insulin needles.
 - **Subcutaneous Injections** with common needle length between 5/8 and 1/2 in.
- **Longer needles** are commonly used for **Intramuscular Injections**.
 - Common sizes: 1 or 1.5 inches (like the syringe that comes in an injectable naloxone kit).



REMINDER

Injecting should NOT hurt! If it does, you might have the wrong size or gauge. If you are not sure, try a few different ones.



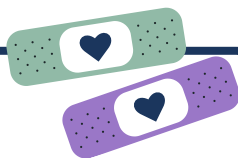
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Tips For Injecting After Injection Safety

IMPORTANT!

To prevent infection and ensure proper healing, cover the injection site with a bandage.

The puncture caused by the needle can create an entry point for bacteria and other germs. Bandages also promote faster healing.



Safely get rid of your used needles in a sharp's disposal container or in a strong hard plastic container that has a lid like:



- Laundry detergent bottle
- Cat litter container
- Bleach container
- Gatorade bottle

When the container is about $\frac{3}{4}$ full, return to your local syringe services program!

- ✓ Put the lid on and seal it with duct tape.
- ✓ Write "**Do Not Recycle**" on the container.



♥ REMEMBER ♥

There are many reasons why people cannot use all these safer injection steps or stop injecting substances. Using as many of these safer practices as possible and as often as possible, will dramatically reduce harm. Even using just one tip reduces harm.

Don't forget to celebrate small steps and any positive change!

Additional Resources

This guide was informed by the following resources:



[OHRC- A Guide to Using Harm Reduction Supplies as Engagement Tools](#)



[Trans Care BC: Intramuscular Injections PDF](#)



[Trans Care BC: Subcutaneous Injections PDF](#)



[Trans Care BC: Hormone Injection Supplies Toolkit PDF](#)



[University of Pittsburgh: Safer Injection Guide](#)



[Fenway Health: Safer Hormone Injection Guide](#)



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