

Your guide to self-administration of Cytarabine by subcutaneous injection

Resource developed by:
South East London Cancer Alliance
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust
King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

Introduction

This booklet provides useful instructions and information for patients about injecting cytarabine at home.

Please note:

The information in this leaflet is to help with administering your medication at home and is not intended to replace the advice of your nurse or doctor. A nurse will already have shown you how to give yourself a subcutaneous (under the skin) injection, and they will have assessed that you are both able and comfortable to do so. A nurse will call you for a phone consultation on the day of administration to check that you have successfully administered your injection.

If you have any questions that are not covered in this leaflet, or if you are unsure about how to inject cytarabine, please contact your clinical team in the hospital who will be able to support and help you.

Supply of cytarabine

Cytarabine will be supplied to you in a syringe for injection. You will either be told to collect your cytarabine syringes and equipment from the chemotherapy day unit, or your medications will be delivered to you by a courier service.

If you are collecting cytarabine from the chemotherapy day unit

Cytarabine requires storage at room temperature. Please bring a suitable plastic container (i.e. Tupperware) with you upon collecting your medication so the syringes are protected from damage.

When transporting cytarabine home, please help reduce the effects of changes in temperature by:

- Not exposing the syringes or container to direct sunlight
- Not leaving syringes/containers in a parked car where the temperature may rise significantly for an extended period
- Not exposing the syringes/containers to hot air blowers in cars/transport
- Not placing syringes/containers in direct contact with heaters

Storage at Home

Cytarabine syringes should be kept in the sealed bag/container supplied by the pharmacy team (and should stay in your plastic container if you transported your medication home). Syringes should be stored in a safe place (as soon as possible on return home if you collected them from the hospital), out of reach of children and pets.

If any of the syringes have expired or been damaged, please contact an appropriate healthcare professional on the chemotherapy day unit as soon as possible to arrange a replacement dose. Any unused cytarabine syringes should be returned to the hospital in a suitable plastic container, for safe disposal at your next appointment (please pass the medication to a nurse in either the chemotherapy day unit or clinic who will arrange this for you).

In the event that the syringes have not been stored at room temperature, then please contact your clinical team in the hospital for advice.

Equipment Required

All the equipment required for administering cytarabine at home will be supplied to you by the hospital. If you require further supplies of equipment, please contact a nurse in the chemotherapy day unit. Equipment supplied will include:

- **Syringe(s) containing cytarabine for your treatment**
- **Needles** (Orange safety needles and red needles)
- **Alcohol and gauze swabs**
- **Gloves**
- **Apron (only required if administration by a carer)**
- **Sharp bin** - this is a purple lid cytotoxic sharps disposal bin. The bin should not be over-filled, the lid must be closed when full and you must return it to the hospital when it is full or at the end of your treatment, whichever happens first.

Safety and handling requirements

- Cytarabine should not be handled by women who are either trying for a baby, are already pregnant or who are breastfeeding.
- Only people who are trained to handle cytarabine syringes should handle them when they are out of the bag/box.
- Cytarabine syringe(s) should always be kept out of reach of children and pets.
- If your carer obtains a needle stick injury (where the needle has pierced or scratched the skin), the area should be thoroughly washed with water, and they should contact the day unit for further advice.

In the event of a spillage follow this procedure:

PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW IN THE EVENT OF A SPILLAGE

1. Put on two pairs of disposable gloves
2. Soak up the spill using kitchen towel for small spills by working from the outside of the spill inwards, placing the absorbent towel gently over the spill to avoid splashing
3. Place the kitchen towel and any sharp material into a bag and then into the cytotoxic sharps bin
4. Take off the top pair of gloves and clean the floor or work surface with warm soapy water (i.e. washing up liquid) and kitchen towel
5. After cleaning put the kitchen towel and gloves into a bag and then into the cytotoxic sharps bin
6. Wash hands thoroughly
7. Contact the Nurse in Charge (NiC) on the chemotherapy day unit to inform them of the spillage and to arrange replacement medication if required

PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW IN THE EVENT OF A CYTOTOXIC SPILL ONTO SKIN OR MUCOUS MEMBRANES*

(For example, at the nostrils, mouth, lips, eyelids or ears)*

In the event of accidental contact with cytotoxic medication, the following procedures should be adopted immediately:

1. Wash the area thoroughly with soapy water as soon as possible. For large spillages/splashes, remove contaminated clothing (and wash separately from other clothes), shower and put on a clean set of clothes
2. In the event of a cytotoxic splash to the eye, irrigate thoroughly with tap water for approximately 20 minutes
3. Immediately report the incident to your clinical nurse specialist or the nurse in charge at the chemotherapy day unit

Preparing and administering your subcutaneous cytarabine injection

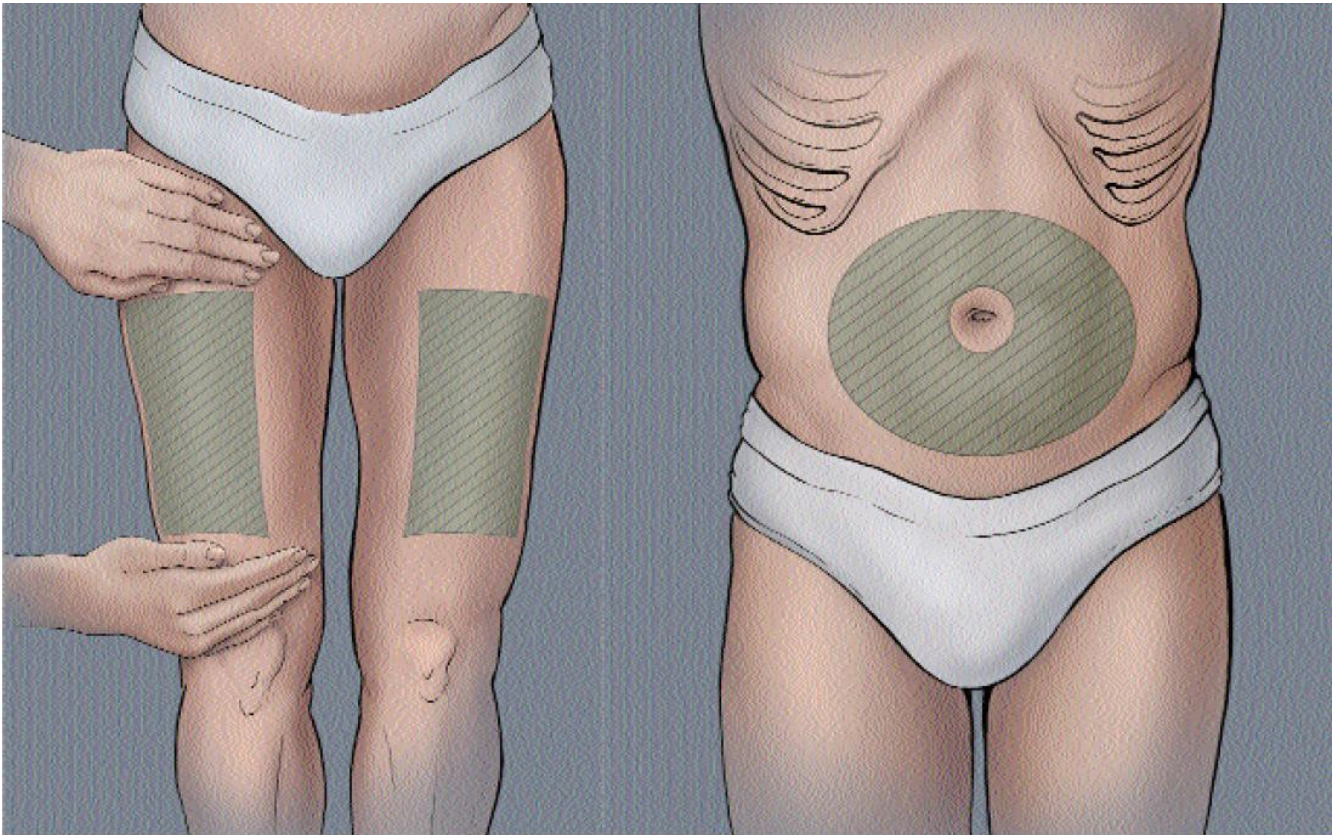
A nurse in the chemotherapy day unit will have shown you how to give yourself a subcutaneous (under the skin) injection.

We have also prepared a short video on how to administer subcutaneous injections which you may find helpful to refer to whilst you get used to self-administering: <https://info.guyscanceracademy.co.uk/giving-yourself-an-injection/>

How to prepare and administer cytarabine

1. Remove the cytarabine syringe from its safe storage container.
2. Check the details on the label of the medication to ensure it has your name on it.
3. Check the syringe contents are clear and not discoloured and the volume matches the label.
4. Check the injection has not passed the expiry date.
5. Gather all your equipment and place on a clean surface.
6. Wash your hands thoroughly and dry them.
7. Remove and open the packets containing the syringe and the gauze swabs
8. Remove appropriate clothing to expose the area you will be using for the injection (e.g. your abdomen or thigh, see the diagram below). Remember to alternate between your left and right and abdomen and your right and left thigh (refer to Subcutaneous injection site record sheet).
9. Open an alcohol swab packet and take out the swab.
10. If a carer is administering the medication then they should put on an apron and gloves.
11. Use the alcohol swab to clean the skin where you are going to inject yourself and allow to dry for 15-30 seconds
12. Take the plastic cover off the needle and hold the syringe between the thumb and forefinger of your dominant hand as if holding a dart
13. With your free hand gently pinch the skin of the area chosen for injection to elevate the subcutaneous tissue and if you can grasp 2 inches then inject at 90°C. If you can only pinch 1 inch then insert the needle at an angle (45°C).
14. When the needle is completely inserted, slowly push the plunger down as far as it will go. The entire contents of the syringe should be injected.
15. Withdraw the needle and apply gentle pressure on the injection site with a gauze swab. Do not massage the area.
16. Cover the injection site with a plaster if necessary.
17. Do not put the needle back into the needle cover.
18. Put the used needle and syringe into the sharps container. When this is filled to the line on the bin, close the lid and bring it back to hospital at your next visit or contact your local council to arrange collection.

Sites for subcutaneous injection



Adverse effects to cytarabine

Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will advise you on the common side effects of cytarabine treatment.

Any raised temperatures above 38°C must be reported immediately to your healthcare team (please refer to the last page of this leaflet for contact information)

Do's and Don'ts

Do's

Do alternate between the right and left abdomen or thigh for injection

Do make sure you put your used syringes in the sharps bin each time that you inject – never leave them lying around

Do administer the injection at roughly the same time each morning (and afternoon if administering twice daily)

Do ensure to contact your chemotherapy day unit if you are unsure of how to inject or would like further information

Do ensure that your medication is stored appropriately and out of reach of children and pets

Don'ts

Do not put the syringe down anywhere or touch the needle with anything before injecting

Do not inject into bruised or scarred/damaged skin

Do not rub the skin after you have injected

Do not share or let anyone else use your syringes or medications

Do not dispose of any equipment or medication in general household waste

Frequently asked questions & troubleshooting

Q. Could someone else at home give me my injection?

A. Yes, a carer/member of your household can give you your injection if they have been shown how to administer correctly.

Q. What if I miss a dose of cytarabine or forget to administer it?

A. If you miss a dose for any reason, please contact your clinical nurse specialist or the chemotherapy day unit for urgent advice.

Q. What if I want to discontinue self-administration at any point?

A. If at any time you change your mind about self-administration or there are any reasons why self-administration becomes unsafe then you should contact your clinical nurse specialist or the chemotherapy day unit for advice. It will be possible for you to restart having treatment on the appropriate day unit via nurse administration if that is preferable.

Any unused cytarabine syringes must be returned to the chemotherapy day unit for safe disposal.

Q. What if I experience side effects to cytarabine?

A. If you have any concerns that are not addressed in this leaflet then please contact your hospital (contact information is on the last page of this leaflet)

Contact information

For general queries about self-administration or equipment issues, please contact your day unit below:

Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Day Unit

Tel: 0207 188 6452 / Email: HomeMonitoring@gstt.nhs.uk (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

Out of hours contact:

Acute Oncology Services Tel: 0207 188 3754

King's College Hospital (KCH) – Denmark Hill Chemotherapy Day Unit

Tel: 0203 299 9819 (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

Out of hours contact:

KCH switchboard Tel: 0203 299 9000. Ask to speak to the haematology registrar on-call

Lewisham and Greenwich Hospital Chemotherapy Day Unit

Helpline number if you are unwell or need urgent advice

Tel: 07795612236 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am – 5pm)

Out of hours contact:

Acute Oncology Services Tel: 0207 188 3754

Princess Royal University Hospital Day Unit

Tel: 01689 863 155 (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

Out of hours contact:

GSTT Acute Oncology Services Tel: 0207 188 3754

Queen Mary's Hospital Day Unit

Please contact Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital Day unit

Tel: 0207 188 6452 / Email: HomeMonitoring@gstt.nhs.uk (Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm)

Out of hours contact:

Acute Oncology Services Tel: 0207 188 3754

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact the relevant chemotherapy day unit via the numbers provided above.