The Patient Taking Subcutaneous Heparin

Thank you for choosing the Medical College of Georgia Hospitals and Clinics for your health care needs. Your physician has prescribed the drug heparin for you. This information is to help answer some of your questions about heparin and to give you instructions to follow. If you have any other questions, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Heparin belongs to a group of drugs called anticoagulants. Most people call these drugs blood thinners. Heparin does not actually make your blood thin. It slows the time it takes for your blood to clot. This may help to prevent harmful clots from forming in your blood vessels.

Why do you need to take this medicine?

Heparin has been prescribed for you because you have a condition that increases your chances of a harmful clot forming. How long you will need to take heparin depends on your condition and how long your doctor feels you will be at risk of a clot forming.

When taking Heparin:
1. Take the exact dose prescribed. (Too much increases chances of bleeding, too little will not protect against clots forming).
2. Take your heparin at the same times each day to keep a good level of medicine in your blood. If you realize a dose has been missed, that dose should be taken as soon as possible. However, if you do not remember until it is almost time for your next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your regular schedule. Do not double the next dose or take an extra dose to “catch up” because it may cause bleeding.
4. Keep used and unused needles and syringes out of reach of children. Dispose of used needles and syringes in a non-recyclable plastic bottle (such as a soft drink bottle). When the bottle is full, screw the cap on securely and seal with mailing tape. Dispose of the bottle in the trash.
5. Notify your dentist, pharmacist or any new doctor taking care of you that you are taking heparin.
6. Avoid aspirin and other over the counter medications containing aspirin, salicylates or drugs that may interact with heparin. Do not use ibuprofen (Advil, Nuprin) unless directed by your doctor.
7. Store heparin at room temperature away from heat and direct light.
8. While you are taking this medication, avoid sports or other activities that may cause you to be injured. Call your doctor if you experience any falls, blows to your body or head, or any other injuries, because you may have bleeding inside your body without your knowing about it.
9. Use a soft toothbrush and floss gently.
10. Use an electric shaver instead of a blade.

Possible Complications:
Unusual bleeding may indicate that your heparin needs to be adjusted. It is important to look for and tell your doctor about:
- Unusual bleeding (black and blue marks on your skin) for unknown reasons
- Bleeding that does not stop
- Nose bleeds
- Bleeding from the gums when brushing your teeth
- Coughing up blood or vomiting material that looks like coffee grounds
- Red or dark brown urine, or bloody or black, tarry stools
- More bleeding than usual when you get your menstrual period
- Dizziness, trouble breathing, chest pain, or feeling weak or more tired than usual
- Unexpected, severe headache

**No matter how slight, notify your doctor if you have any of these warning signs.**

Call your doctor immediately if you have a change in the skin color of your face, fast or irregular breathing, swelling of your eyelids or around your eyes, shortness of breath, wheezing, hives, or itching. These may be signs of an allergic reaction.

**How do I give heparin?**
The heparin is given subcutaneously which means into the “fat pad” on your stomach. The area indicated by the dots below should be used, alternating from left to right each time the medication is given. You will be using a “tubex injector” (shown below) and a sterile medication cartridge to administer your medication.
How do I administer the heparin?

Step 1 - Wash your hands.

Step 2 - Turn the ribbed collar to the “OPEN” position until it stops. (Diagram 1)

Step 3 - Hold the injector with the open end up and fully insert the medication cartridge. Tighten the ribbed collar in the direction of the “CLOSE” arrow. (Diagram 2)

Step 4 - Screw the plunger rod into the plunger of the sterile cartridge until resistance is felt.

Step 5 - Engage the needle by pulling the cap down over the silver cartridge hub. The silver hub should be completely covered. (Diagram 3)

Step 6 - Cleanse the skin where the injection is to be made with an alcohol swab or cotton ball moistened with alcohol.
Step 7 - With one hand pick up the syringe and hold it as you would a pencil. Remove the cover. With the other hand pinch up the skin. Insert the needle straight into the skin. Be sure to insert the needle all the way. (Diagram 4)

Step 8 - Push the plunger all the way down to inject the dose. Leave the needle in place for 5-10 seconds then withdraw.

Step 9 - Hold the alcohol swab/ball near the needle and pull the needle straight out of the skin. Press the alcohol swab/ball over the injection site for several seconds. **DO NOT MASSAGE SITE!**

Step 10 - Hold the injector needle point down over a disposal container and loosen the ribbed collar. The sterile cartridge will drop into the container. (Diagram 5)

Follow-up
Dr. ____________________ from the ___________ service will be following your heparin therapy. If you have any problems or questions, call: (706) 721-_____________ and ask for the ________________________ physician on call.