

Giving yourself cytarabine subcutaneous injections at home: a step by step guide

Information for patients, relatives and carers

This booklet will explain step by step how to give yourself cytarabine injections at home. We hope you find this booklet a helpful reminder of the steps involved. Learning the steps will give you confidence to safely self-administer your cytarabine at home.

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What does home self-administration mean for me?

Home self-administration means that instead of needing to travel once or twice a week to the hospital to have your injections, you can give yourself the cytarabine injections in your own home. Your doctor and chemotherapy team will work with you to make sure it is safe to have this treatment at home.

You will still need to come for hospital appointments for other medical and nursing care during your treatment.

What should I expect before starting home self-administration of cytarabine injections?

Your doctor and chemotherapy nurse will make sure that you are safe to self-administer your cytarabine injections at home.

Before you start giving yourself cytarabine injections at home, you will be trained on how to prepare the equipment you need and how to give yourself the injection.

You will be able to practise getting the injection ready and giving yourself the injection with your chemotherapy nurse's help. We will explain the treatment schedule and you will have time to ask questions. You will also be given contact details for advice, support and information 24 hours a day.

You can practise giving yourself the injection with your chemotherapy nurse's help for as long it takes for you to feel confident in self-administering the injections. When you and your chemotherapy nurse are happy that you are confident that you can safely self-administer the injection, you can start giving yourself the injection at home.

If you or your chemotherapy nurse feel it is not safe for you to give yourself the injections, or you decide you no longer want to receive your injections in this way, you can continue to have your cytarabine injections at the chemotherapy day unit.

Never show, instruct nor allow anyone else to administer your cytarabine injections, unless they have also been trained to do so on your behalf. This could be dangerous for both you and the other person.

What do I need to take home

When you visit the chemotherapy day unit at the start of each treatment cycle, you will be supplied with all the equipment and other medication you need for that cycle of treatment. This includes a tray, gauze, alcohol/chlorhexidine wipes, micropore tape, gloves, sharps bin, spillage kit and the packs with the injections.

How will I be reviewed and monitored?

During your treatment, you will have regular review appointments at the chemotherapy day unit where you will be reviewed by your haematology doctor or chemotherapy nurse.

When you start giving yourself injections at home, you will still need to visit the chemotherapy day unit, on the first day of every treatment cycle. During this visit your chemotherapy nurse will assess you to make sure you are well enough to continue your treatment.

If you can continue, your chemotherapy nurse will watch you give yourself the first injection of the new cycle. If, after doing this, you and your chemotherapy nurse are still happy, you can continue to give yourself the rest of the injections in that cycle at home, according to your treatment schedule.

Home administration steps

Make sure you are giving yourself the cytarabine injection on the day it is due. **Check your medication record chart** for your dosing schedule.

Remember it is important to stick to your treatment schedule.

Do not give yourself the injection if you are feeling unwell.
Contact the chemotherapy day unit.

1. Wash your hands

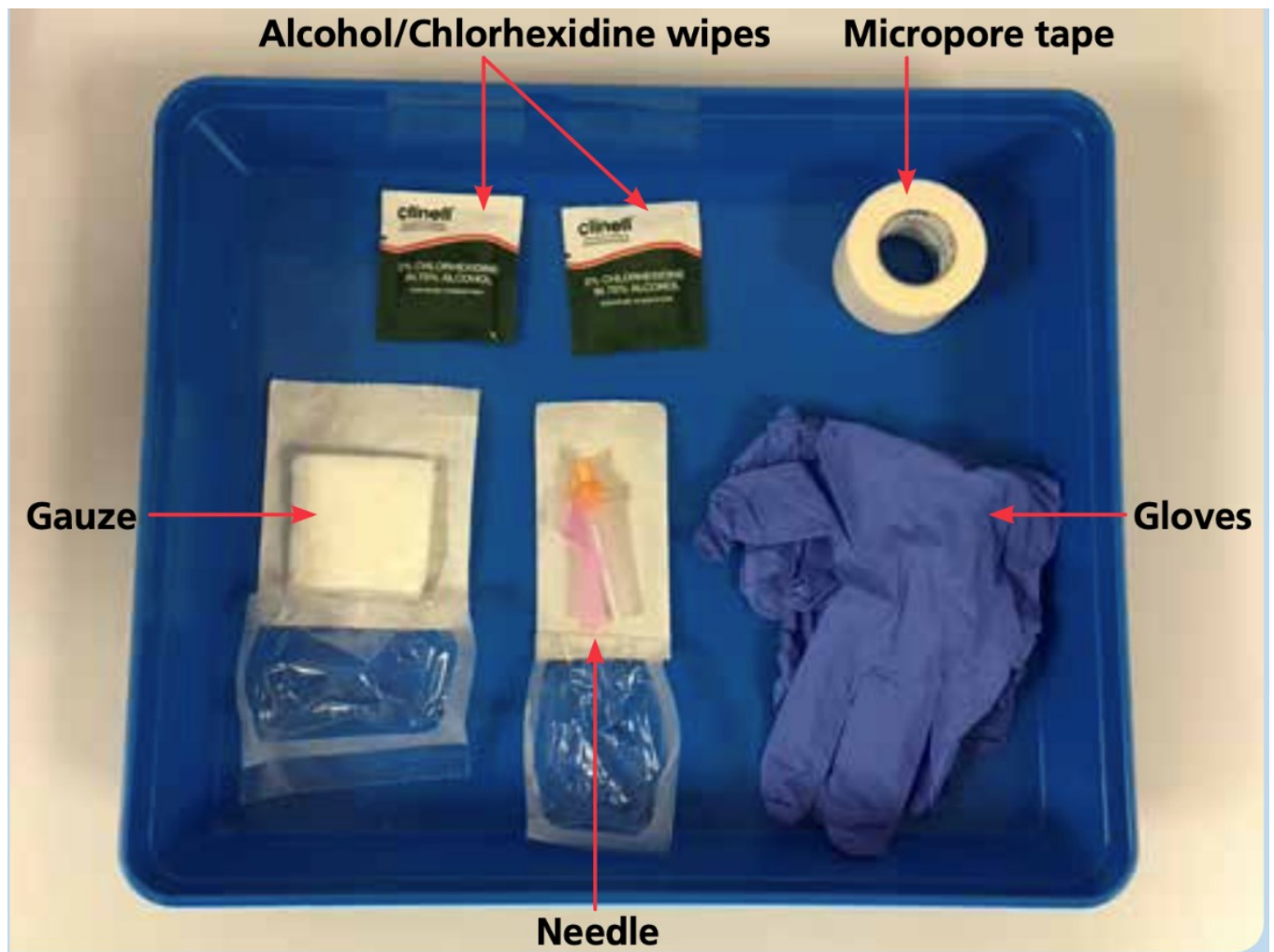
Always wash your hands with soap and warm running water before preparing to give your cytarabine injection. Lather well and rub hands together vigorously for at least 15 seconds (including the backs of your hands and between your fingers). Rinse your hands well and dry them on a towel.



2. Clean the tray and work surface

- Select a clean, quiet area with a solid surface, away from windows, the sink and food.
- Make sure there are no pets, children, pregnant people or people of childbearing potential nearby as cytarabine can be harmful to them.
- Clean the preparation area and tray using antibacterial (alcohol/chlorhexidine) wipes. Allow them to dry.

3. Collect equipment needed



Collect all the equipment and place it in the cleaned tray.

Have the purple-lidded cytotoxic sharps bin close by.

4. Take your cytarabine syringe out of its storage location

How to store your cytarabine syringe is clearly labelled on the packaging. Most syringes are “store at room temperature”. However, certain doses will require refrigeration, so it is important to check the packaging label.

If your cytarabine syringe requires refrigeration, take it out of the fridge and place on the clean tray approximately 30 minutes before administering as it needs to come to room temperature before being injected.

If it does not require refrigeration place the syringe in the cleaned tray with your other equipment.



OR



5. Wear protective gloves

Put on your appropriately sized protective gloves.



6. Check the cytarabine syringe and packaging

- Before taking the syringe out of the bag, make sure it is sealed and intact.
- Check no spillage has occurred in the bag.
- Check that the package has your name on it.
- Make sure the package is still within date. If it is not in date, do not use the injection.
- If all of the above is OK, open the package and check the contents of the syringe is clear and does not have any particles floating in it.



If the storage conditions of your syringes require “store in a fridge”, do not allow the syringes to freeze, as this will affect the cytarabine.

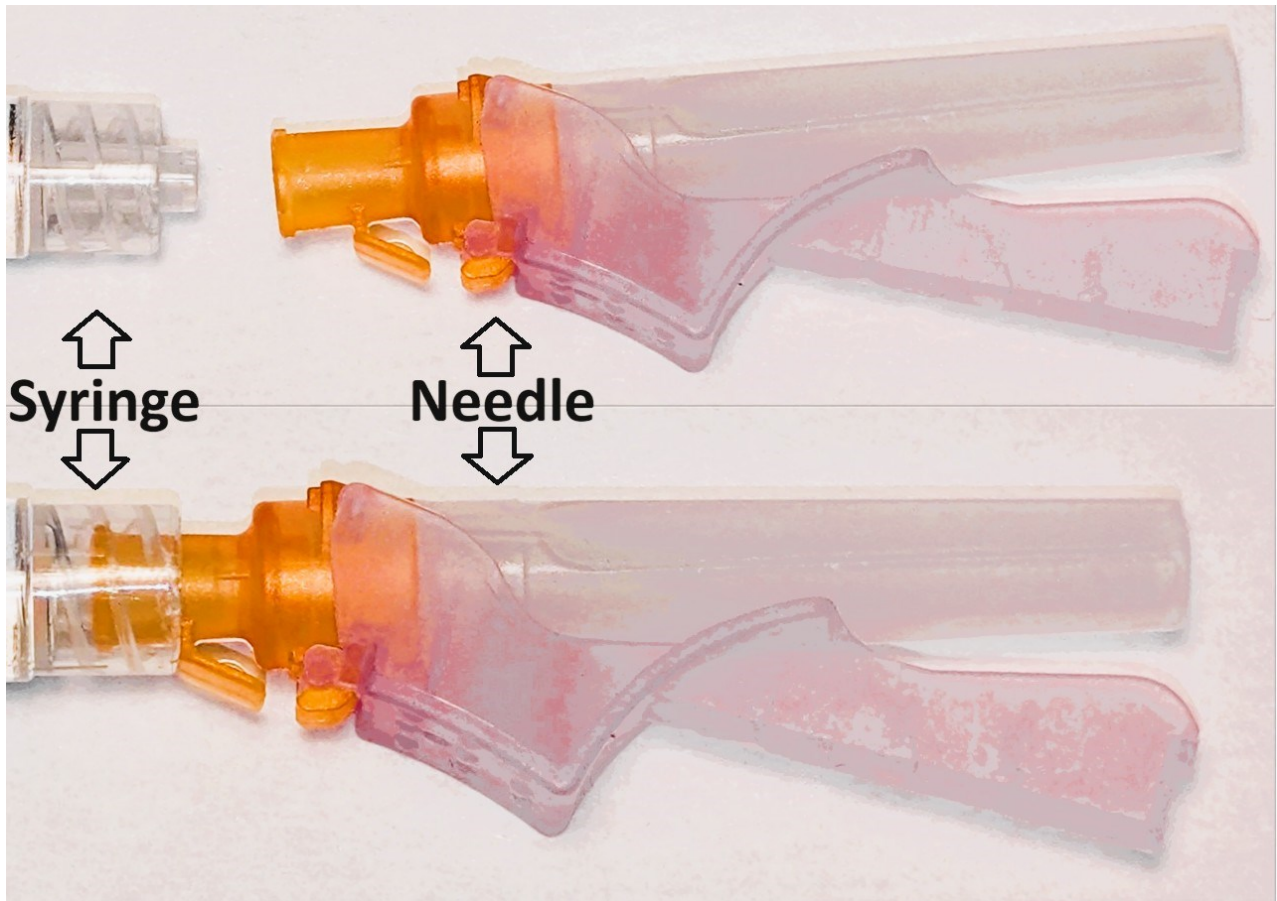
Do not use “store in a fridge” syringes if:

- There has been a power cut that affects the fridge.
- There have been problems with the fridge temperature.
- You notice frozen solution within the syringes.
- You notice the solution inside the syringes is cloudy, has changed colour, or has floating particles in it. Please make sure the solution in the syringes is clear.

If any of the above have occurred, place the syringe and package into the purple-lidded cytotoxic sharps bin.

Contact the chemotherapy day unit immediately to arrange for a replacement.

7. Attach the needle to the syringe



- Open the syringe and needle pack from the corners.
- Twist off the cap on the end of the syringe (this is either white or red).
- Twist on the needle. Make sure it is twisted on as far as it will go or the cytarabine may leak out.
- Try to avoid touching the hub of the syringe (the top end of the syringe) and the shaft or top of the needle when preparing and administering your injection.

8. Find an injection site



Sit comfortably, so you can see your tummy easily.

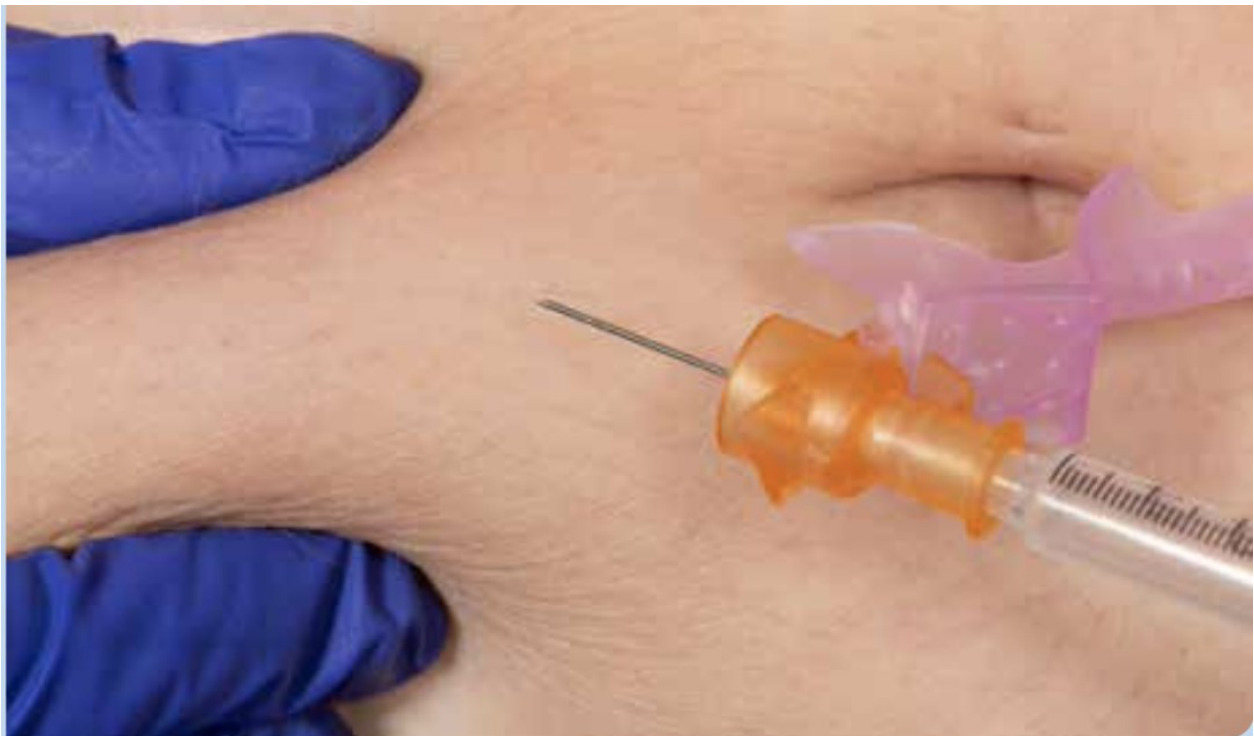
- Choose an area about two to five centimetres away from your belly button. The ideal part is a fatty area where you can pinch an inch of flesh.
- The subcutaneous injection must not be given into skin which is broken, hardened, inflamed, swollen, bruised or damaged by previous injection. If you are unsure, choose a different site or ask your chemotherapy nurse for advice.
- Use a different injection site for each administration.

9. Clean the injection site

Before injecting, clean the injection site with an alcohol/chlorhexidine wipe and allow to dry.

Open the gauze pack, so the gauze swab is available if needed later on. Also open the lid of the purple lidded sharps bin, keeping both close by to use later.

10. Give your injection



- Flip the protective cover of the needle open.
- Hold the syringe like a pencil, in the hand you write with.
- Pinch your skin at the injection site.
- Push the needle straight into this pinched area, at a 90-degree angle to your tummy.
- Inject the cytarabine solution into your tummy's fatty tissue by gently pushing the plunger down with your index/first finger.
- Push slowly, until the plunger of the syringe can go no further down the barrel. Keep hold of the fatty tissue and count to ten. Then remove the needle from your skin and release your pinch.
- If any fluid or blood leaks from the injection site, press on the site lightly with a gauze swab for 10 seconds. Place the used swab into the purple-lidded sharps bin.
- Flip the protective cover over the needle. Dispose of the needle and syringe straight into the purple-lidded cytotoxic sharps bin. Do not detach the needle from the syringe.

11. Disposing of equipment

All equipment that has been in contact with the cytarabine, or your body fluid, must be disposed of into the purple-lidded cytotoxic sharps bin provided (see photo), disposing of your protective gloves last.

Do not overfill the cytotoxic sharps bin. When it is full up to the line shown on the label, close it securely and take it back to the chemotherapy day unit for safe disposal. You will be given a replacement.



12. Wash your hands

Wash your hands again with soap and warm water, as described in step 1.

13. Record your treatment on your medication chart

Consider using this table to record each administration of your injection.

Cytarabine is usually given as a subcutaneous injection twice daily for 10 days for each cycle.

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4	Cycle 5	Cycle 6
Day 1						
Day 2						
Day 3						
Day 4						
Day 5						
Day 6						
Day 7						
Day 8						
Day 9						
Day 10						

Possible side effects of using cytarabine

It is very important that you report any side effects straight away.

Do not delay – if you feel unwell, please contact the chemotherapy day unit immediately.

This treatment can cause many different side effects. Some are more likely to occur than others and not everyone gets all the side effects. The possible side effects from your treatment will be explained to you by your haematology doctor and chemotherapy nurse.

Do not administer cytarabine if you experience any of the following symptoms or side effects, or if you develop any other symptoms. Please contact the chemotherapy day unit and speak to a healthcare professional first.

Infections and raised temperature

Cytarabine can reduce the number of white blood cells in your body. These help to fight infection. If you have a low number of white blood cells, you will be more likely to get infections. A low white blood cell count is called neutropenia.

Signs of an infection include:

- A temperature of 37.5°C or above, or below 36°C.
- Suddenly feeling unwell, even if your temperature is normal.
- Feeling shivery, shaky, a sore throat, cough, diarrhoea or needing to pass urine (wee) a lot.

Other common side effects

- Feeling sick (Nausea), being sick (vomiting), tummy (abdominal) pain, diarrhoea, difficulty swallowing.
- Sore mouth and ulcers, skin rash.
- Thinning of the hair or hair loss.
- Anaemia (due to low red blood cells) and bruising or bleeding (due to low platelets). This can be prolonged, and you may need a transfusion.
- Pain, swelling and redness at the injection site.

If you feel unwell or develop any of the symptoms above, contact the chemotherapy day unit right away.

How do I safely dispose of the syringes, contaminated waste and equipment?

You will be provided with purple-lidded cytotoxic sharps bins. Dispose of used needles, syringes and any contaminated waste in the purple-lidded bin immediately after use. Do not empty the contents of unused syringes. **Never** discard chemotherapy medication or equipment in general household waste.

Keep the cytotoxic sharps bin stored out of harm's way, take particular care to keep it out of reach of children and animals. Do not overfill the purple-lidded sharps bin. When it is **three quarters full**, close it securely and return it to the chemotherapy day unit for safe disposal.

What do I do if there is an accidental needle stick injury?

If you or anyone else accidentally punctures their skin with the needle, encourage the puncture site to bleed, ideally by holding it under running water. Wash the wound using running water, but do not scrub it. Do not suck the wound.

Dry the wound and cover it with a plaster or dressing. You should also seek medical advice by contacting the chemotherapy day unit immediately.

What do I do if I spill the contents of a syringe?

You will be given a Cytotoxic Spillage Kit and information about how to use it. Keep the spillage kit and information to hand in case you need it.

If you spill the contents of the syringe on to your skin, wash it off immediately. Hold the affected area under cool water for 10 minutes. Do not scrub as unbroken skin provides protection.

If the cytarabine gets into your eyes, wash them with plenty of cold water for at least 10 minutes. **You must then go to A&E immediately.** Please do not drive yourself.

If you spill cytarabine onto a surface, restrict the area by keeping all people and pets out of the contaminated area. Keep the sharps bin near and remove the purple lid. Do not involve anyone else to prevent them being exposed to the chemotherapy.

Open the spillage kit away from the contaminated area. Do not touch the spillage until you have put the gloves on. Cover your clothes with the plastic apron provided in the spillage kit and wear the face mask.

Use the absorbent material in the kit to mop up any spilled liquid. Work from the outside of the spillage to the centre, to avoid further spreading of the spilled fluid.

When the chemotherapy spillage has been cleared up, place the absorbent material, the gloves and any protective clothing used into the plastic bag contained within the spillage kit. Dispose of the bag into the purple-lidded cytotoxic bin.

When the spill area has dried, wash the area with water only and leave to dry. Do not add any cleaning products. If the spillage is on a carpet, allow to dry after washing and then vacuum (please do not use a steam cleaner, as this may cause the chemotherapy to evaporate into the air, where it could be breathed in).

Contact the chemotherapy day unit to report all spillage incidents.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Simas Vaitkevicius, Haematology Pharmacist, simas.vaitkevicius@nhs.net.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

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If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

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