

Oxfordshire Children's Diabetes Service  
Children's Hospital, Oxford  
Horton General Hospital, Banbury

# Using an Insulin Pen

## Top tips for using an insulin pen

- Always do an 'air shot' of approximately 2 units, to make sure the pen is working correctly. If insulin does not come out of the tip of the needle, dial up again until you see insulin coming out. This is particularly important when you put in a new cartridge of insulin. Once you've done the 'air shot', dial up the correct dose.
- If you dial too much insulin by mistake, you can dial back to the correct dose.
- Make sure injection sites are rotated, to avoid lumpy areas developing.
- Pinch the skin up and put the needle of the pen in at a right angle to the skin.
- To inject the insulin, press the plunger down and leave the needle in the skin for at least 10 slow counts, to allow the last drops of insulin to be completely absorbed. Remove the needle from the skin carefully.
- The needle should be removed immediately from the pen. Place the large plastic cap back on the end and untwist, then put the cap and needle straight into the sharps bin.
- Use a new needle for every injection.
- A safety needle should be provided for school staff who are giving injections. These are available from your GP on prescription.
- Remember to change the insulin cartridge when the red bung reaches the coloured stripe, to make sure you have enough insulin for the next injection. If you are using a disposable pen, throw away the whole pen and replace when the plunger reaches the 20 unit mark.
- When changing the cartridge, make sure the plunger is pushed/wound back before loading the new cartridge.
- Insulin lasts 1 month at room temperature. Make a note of the date when you start a new insulin cartridge. If you have not used all the insulin in the pen within 1 month, throw away the cartridge or disposable pen and start with fresh insulin from the fridge.
- **Never put the pen in the fridge, unless it is a disposable pen.** The pen should be kept at room temperature, but all unused cartridges/disposable pens of insulin should be stored in the fridge. Cold insulin can be more painful when injected, so it may be helpful to remove it from the fridge 15 minutes before using, if you need to replace an insulin cartridge or use a disposable pen.

**Note:** If you are using a mixed insulin called Humulin M3, make sure the insulin has been mixed properly each time before injecting. It is safer to do this without the needle attached. Turn the pen upside down ten times, then put the needle on the end and follow the previous instructions.

If you have any questions, please contact a Diabetes Specialist Nurse (see contact sheet for telephone numbers).

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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