

Heparin (low molecular weight heparin – LMWH)

Heparin is a blood thinning treatment that does not harm your baby. It reduces clotting in the blood and can possibly help a pregnancy to implant in the womb.

LMWH (low weight molecular heparin) is prescribed as a daily injection to be given just under the skin. There is no need to be monitored whilst using LMWH unless you have previously been given blood-thinning treatment with unfractionated heparin.

What are the side effects?

If you follow the instructions below about injecting heparin, you should not have problems.

- Bruising is possible at the site of injection.
- About 1 out of 56 people (1.8%) develop a skin allergy to heparin.
- Prolonged use of heparin tends to cause osteoporosis (thinning of your bones) and fractures. The risk is very slight in women on LMWH only during pregnancy, with fractures occurring in only about 1 out of 2,500 women (0.04%).
- Heparin causes significant bleeding during pregnancy or delivery in fewer than 1 out of 50 women (2%).
- Heparin Induced Thrombocytopenia (HIT) is a very rare serious reaction to treatment where blood platelet levels fall sharply, generally in the first two weeks of treatment. Untreated HIT would cause severe clotting which could be fatal. However, a study of almost 3,000 women on LWMH only during pregnancy found nobody developed HIT, so monitoring is not advised, unless you have previously had unfractionated heparin.

Nevertheless, **if you get a skin reaction other than bruising at the injection site, or your arms or legs become swollen, painful or weak, let your doctor know as soon as possible and mention that you are on low molecular weight heparin.**

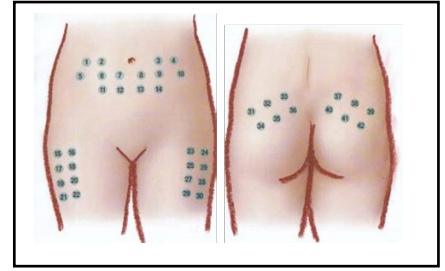
How do I self-inject LMWH?

The best areas for injection are:

- The U-shape area around the belly button. It is safe to inject LMWH in the abdomen while pregnant.
- The upper outer side of the thigh.
- The upper outer part of the buttock.

Step 1

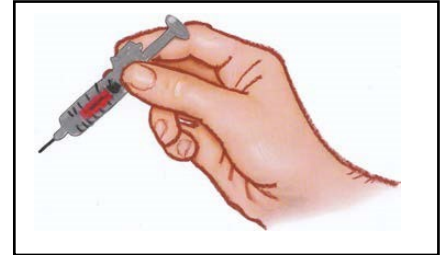
Wash your hands and ensure the chosen area is clean and dry. Be sure to change the site of injection each day. You can use these pictures to help you select a new site each day. Check the expiry date on the syringe label. Do not use the injection after the expiry date.



Step 2

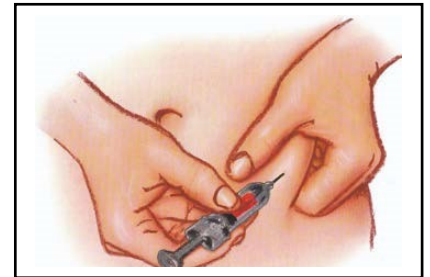
Open the pack and remove the syringe. Be sure the medicine is clear and has nothing floating in it. If you see anything, talk to your doctor or midwife.

To ensure delivery of the full dose, do not remove the air bubble from the syringe.



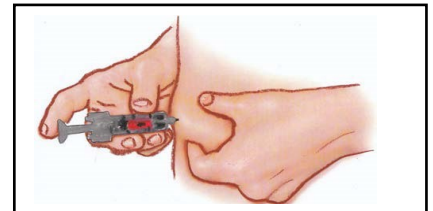
Step 3

You need to make sure that you inject LMWH into fatty tissue. To do this, pinch (between the thumb and fingers of one hand) a fold of skin on the abdomen (while sitting) or outer thigh (sitting or lying down). Because there is enough fatty tissue in the buttock, pinching a fold of skin is not necessary. LMWH must not be injected into the muscle.



Step 4

Hold the syringe with the other hand. Insert the entire needle into the fold of skin at a 45-90 degree angle. Then slowly press the plunger down until the full dose of LMWH has been given.



Step 5

Remove the needle while letting go on the fold of skin. Do not rub or massage the place where you have just put the injection. If you do, you might get a bruise. Dispose of the syringe in an appropriate container. The container should be stored away from children. If you do not have an appropriate container, contact your midwife or GP.



Further information

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your treatment, please call the Fertility Clinic and ask to talk to one of the nurses.

0118 322 7286

The clinic doctors produce a number of information sheets especially for this clinic and update them frequently. You can find some of these sheets on the Trust website leaflet catalogue <https://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/leaflets-catalogue/> by typing in the leaflet name.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Dr C Rimmer (Associate Specialist Fertility / GUM), October 2018

Reviewed: January 2021, amended September 2022

Next review due: January 2023