

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

A Needle and Syringe Program (the exchange) worker can give you information about staying healthy and looking after your veins.

DirectLine

1800 888 236 • www.directline.org.au
24-hour. If you want to talk to someone about your drug use or find a support service.

DHHS Needle and Syringe Program information

To look for a Needle and Syringe Program near you, internet search needle-syringe-program.

Understand Ice

www.understandice.org.au

SAFER
USING **03**

VEINS

Looking after your veins can help you stay healthy and reduce the chances of vein damage and infections like hepatitis C (hep C).

VEINS AND ARTERIES

- + Veins carry blood towards the heart and don't have a pulse
- + Arteries pump blood away from the heart and do have a pulse
- + Veins also have valves that keep blood flowing in the right direction.

HEALTHY VEINS

You've got to look after your veins. If you lose a usable vein it's going to make it much harder to inject and can lead to lots of health problems. There are things you can do to help to keep your veins healthy.

Drink enough water

Staying hydrated helps with blood flow and will bump up your veins, making it easier to find one.

If you don't stay hydrated your body won't work properly. Try to drink water regularly throughout the day, especially in the hot months.

Try to avoid coffee, fizzy drinks and energy drinks if you're going to have a hit. These often have lots of caffeine in them, which make your veins constrict and make it harder to inject.

Agency details:

New needle

Every time a needle is used it blunts a little. Reusing a needle will cause vein damage, which will lead to lots of problems over time and make track marks more visible. Always using a new sterile syringe and needle will cut down the risk of vein damage.

Control

[Be in control of your own drug use. Learn to inject yourself so you don't have to rely on others.](#)

[There is information on injecting in the brochure titled 'Injecting'.](#)

Rotate the injection site

Learn to inject with each hand so you will be able to access veins in both arms which means that injecting sites will have more time to heal in between shots. Try not to inject in your hands as the vein are fairly fragile, or your feet as there is a high risk of infection.

Water for your mix

Use plenty of sterile water for your hit as it will help protect your veins from harsh substances. If you're injecting pills you'll need about 3mls of water for each injection. If you can't get sterile water, boil some at home and let it cool in a clean glass.

Filtering

Injecting pills like MS Contin® can cause blocked and collapsed veins as well as infections. If you are going to inject pills or any other drugs, it's important to use filters to reduce the risks from injecting filler materials. There is more information on injecting pills in the brochure titled 'Using pills and other medicines'.

Go slowly

The faster you inject, the more chance there is that you'll tear the vein around the needle or lose some of your hit. If you're injecting ice you may also have a tremor or blurred vision. Taking your time will help you not miss your hit.

A healthy diet and exercise can help your veins a lot

Try to eat well. Some foods are really good for strong veins. Try to eat lots of fruit and vegetables and fish. Try to cut down or cut out junk food and ease up on the salt as too much can cause vein damage.

Exercise. Exercise is good for your overall health and really good for your circulation. Walking, cycling and swimming are great exercises to keep healthy.

[There is more about injecting in this series in the brochure titled 'Injecting'.](#)

BLOCKED AND COLLAPSED VEINS

Every time you inject into a vein it causes little tears in your vein. Poor injecting technique or irritation due to the drugs you are using can add to this. The damage is made even worse if you're using large gauge needles or reusing needles. This can affect the blood flow and lead to clots and scar tissue, which then can cause the vein to narrow and block.

Collapsed veins lead to poor circulation which in turn can lead to:

- More infections
- Wounds that won't heal
- Skin dying
- Ulcers
- Problems with your heart, liver, limbs and brain
- Amputations.

If you think a vein is blocked or collapsed, speak to your GP or one of the workers at a primary health clinic about it.

'New veins'

When a vein is blocked or collapses, the blood will try to find another way of getting to your heart. Usually this means using smaller, more delicate veins. This can make them look like new veins but they are not. The extra blood trying to use these veins causes so much pressure on them they balloon. Injecting into these veins can cause them to block very quickly or to pop.

INFECTIONS, DIRTY HITS

AND BLOOD CLOTS

Signs of infection can include:

- Redness, swelling, heat, tenderness/pain
- Fever/chills
- Difficulty breathing.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C (hep C) is a virus that affects your liver and can lead to liver cancer or liver failure. There are new, very effective hep c treatments available.

There is more information on hepatitis in this series in the brochure titled 'Hep C'.

Bacterial endocarditis

An infection that damages heart valves and can cause heart failure.

Septicemia

Also called blood poisoning, septicemia is a condition caused by a bacterial infection of the blood.

Dirty hit

Caused by bacteria, dirt or a piece of a filter getting injected along with the hit.

Thrombosis

Blood clots due to damage of the lining of the vein.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

A blood clot that forms in the deep veins of the leg.

Don't ignore the signs of infection

Don't assume that an infection will get better by itself – it may not, and the sooner you get an infection treated, the easier it is to fix.

[There is information on avoiding infections in the brochure titled 'Infections'.](#)
