

VEINTENANCE

what you need to
know about safer
injecting



New Zealand
Needle Exchange
Programme

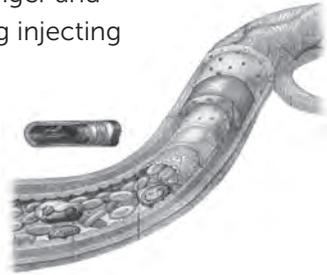
Contents

What you need to know	4
Blood circulation.....	5
Needle gauges.....	6
Where to inject	7
Veins	12
Damaged veins.....	12
Tips on getting veins up	13
Tourniquets	14
Inserting the needle.....	15
Good things to remember are	16
Safer injecting	17

What you NEED TO KNOW

Let's face it. Injecting drugs is dangerous.

However, you can reduce the danger and look after your veins by improving injecting techniques. There is no sure way of making injecting safe for your veins, but there are ways to reduce vein damage. Learn to look after your veins. You only get one set.



What you need to know:

- The correct needle gauge and syringe size to use
- What veins to use
- How to filter your drugs
- How to use a tourniquet correctly
- How to insert a needle correctly
- How to put your shot away slowly

Acidity in shots harms your veins

Blood CIRCULATION

If you are going to inject drugs it is important to understand how blood flows around your body.

There are three types of blood vessels:

1. **Arteries** which carry oxygenated blood at high pressure from the heart and lungs to the tissues of the body;
2. **Veins** which carry blood back to the heart and lungs at low pressure;

and joining them together are millions of tiny blood vessels called:

3. **Capillaries** which transfer oxygen and waste products between arteries and veins.

You must only inject into veins. Larger arteries have a pulse.

Never inject into a blood vessel that has a pulse

Needle GAUGES

A 22 gauge needle makes a bigger hole than a 26 gauge needle. As the number goes up, the needle gets thinner.

The smaller the needle you use, the less damage you do to your veins. The bigger the needle, the bigger the hole at the injection site, leaving the body more open to infections.

The gauge (size) of needle you use depends on where you are injecting and what drugs you are using.

If you are using your femoral vein you will need to use a smaller gauge and longer needle than if using your arms or hands. Any gauge over 27g is designed for intramuscular NOT intravenous use.

When deciding what syringe is best for you, take your time, think about what drugs you are using and where you are injecting. Don't be afraid to ask for advice at any of our New Zealand Needle Exchange Outlets.

Where to INJECT

The veins in your arms are the most common and least dangerous place to inject. Injecting into your hands, feet or legs can lead to serious complications. The most dangerous places to inject are into your groin and the jugular vein in your neck. Injecting into these places can cause serious problems and could be fatal.

Arms

The best places to inject are in your arm, between your inner elbow and halfway down your forearm, as there are plenty of veins there. The lower you start, the longer your veins will last.



You should only inject into other places if your forearm veins are no longer able to be used.

Hands

Don't inject into your wrist, your fingers or the palm of your hand. Hands have very thin veins so go gently. Swelling often occurs when you inject into your hand so make sure you take off any rings as they may affect your blood flow if your fingers swell up.



Legs

Legs are also high risk areas, especially behind your knees. Don't inject into varicose veins (swollen veins on legs) as this can lead to them getting ulcers. If you do inject into your legs, it should only be done short term.



Blood circulation in the legs may be poor, especially if you are not an active person. Veins in the legs are much more likely to develop clots which could break off and lodge in your lungs or heart. Damaging veins in your legs is more serious as they play an important role in getting blood back to the heart.

Always remember to keep your leg elevated for at least five minutes during and after you inject. Even if bleeding has stopped, this will help prevent 'blowup'.

Feet

It is also very risky injecting into your feet. The veins in your feet are small and close to nerves, cartilage and tendons which you definitely want to avoid when injecting. Because the veins are further away from your heart, the blood circulates more slowly, so they take longer to heal. If you are using your feet, give them a good scrub as they have a lot of germs on them. Any infections and swelling can be painful and very slow to heal.



Because the feet have very small veins you will need to inject slowly. You should only do this for a short period of time.

Groin

The femoral vein in your groin is large and relatively easy to locate. However, because it is so close to the femoral nerve and artery it is a VERY RISKY place to inject. If you hit the femoral artery you could bleed to death. The femoral nerve controls leg and muscle movement, so if you hit this nerve it could result in long term problems with movement or even paralysis of your leg. There are also lots of germs in the groin area that can be passed into your body when injecting.



If you must inject here, find the pulse (artery) then move a short distance towards the inside of your leg to find the vein. You will not be able to see your femoral vein and will be injecting blind. Look at the colour of the blood carefully. If it is bright red and frothy you have hit the artery – pull out and apply pressure immediately.

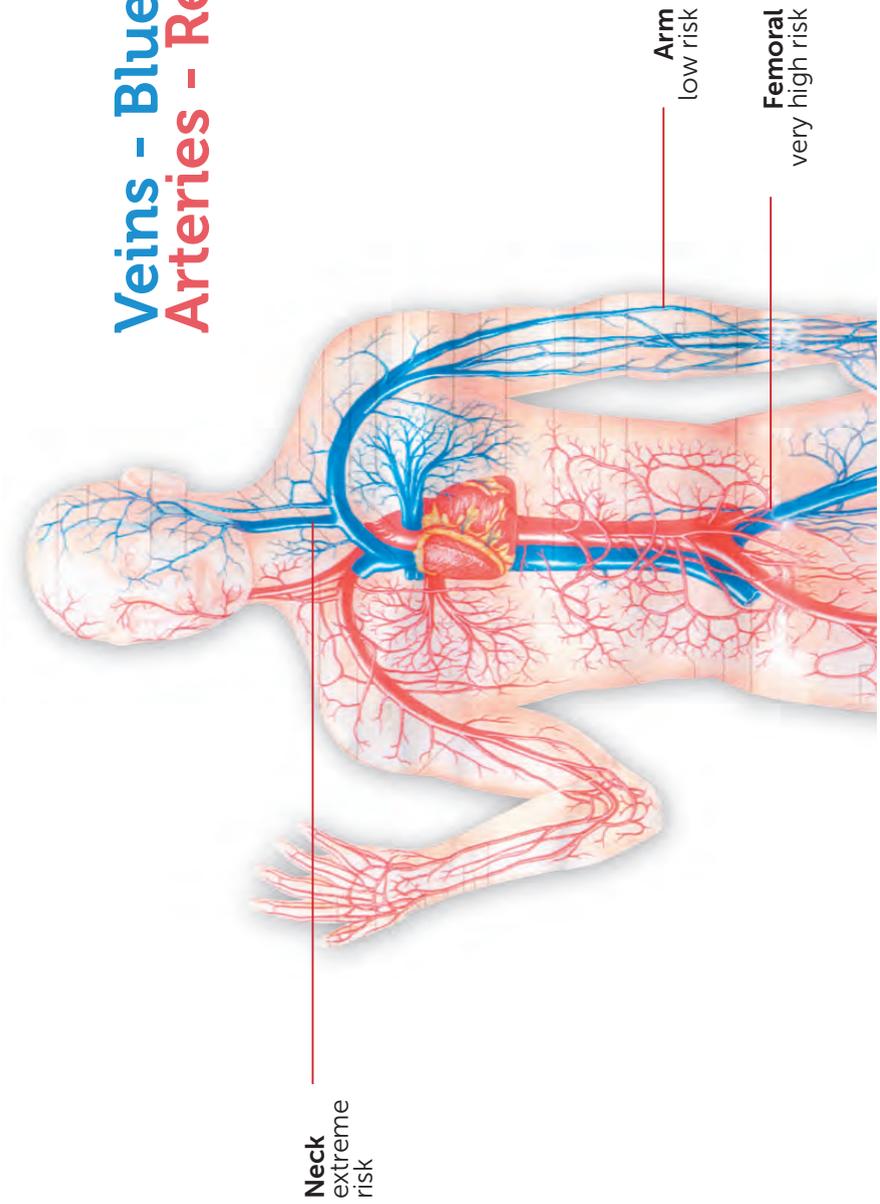
If you are thinking of injecting into your groin, we advise that you talk to one of the staff at your local NZNEP first.

Neck

The jugular vein is the riskiest place to inject because it lies so close to the carotid artery, a major blood vessel that pumps blood directly to the brain. Accidentally hitting this could be fatal. Damaging the jugular vein can interfere with blood circulation to the brain.



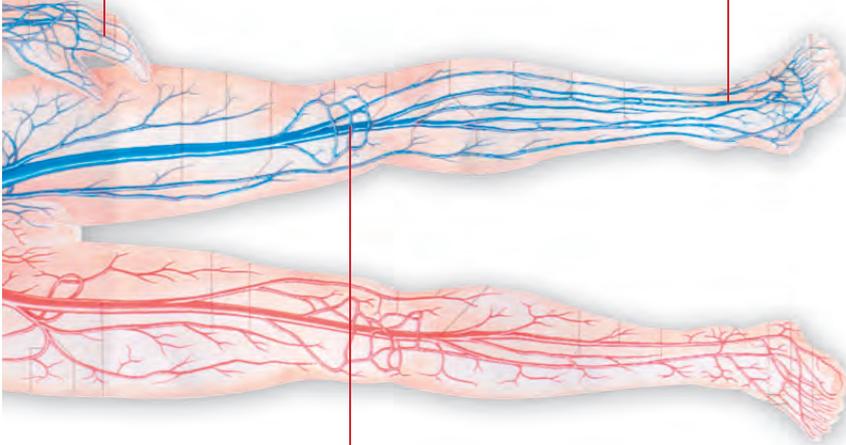
Veins - Blue Arteries - Red



Neck
extreme
risk

Arm
low risk

Femoral
very high risk



Hands
hands are
less safe than
arms because
the veins are
smaller

Feet
small veins
close to nerves
and cartilage

Legs
poor
circulation

VEINS

Veins carry blood back to the heart and lungs at reduced pressure, and they need some help. They get this from the movement of muscles squeezing them and forcing the blood along.

To stop the blood getting squeezed both ways there are small valves that close, preventing the blood from flowing backwards. You should inject with the flow of blood – towards your heart – otherwise you force fluid against the valves, causing extra vein damage, swelling and clotting.

Veins never have a pulse – anything with a pulse is an artery.

Damaged VEINS

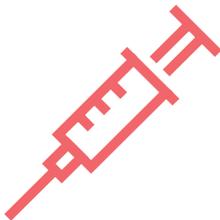
Collapsed veins can occur if you do not look after them. Injecting into the same site without giving it a rest can cause irritation or injury to the vein. When a vein collapses it is very important to stop injecting into it so that it has to heal. Otherwise the damage may be permanent i.e. it will close up for good.

A blown vein is a vein that has been ruptured or punctured causing blood to spill out into the surrounding tissue. When this happens this site should be given a long rest at least until any swelling or bruising has gone.

Tips on getting VEINS UP

- Use a warm compress for 5 or 10 minutes (wheat bags are especially good)
- Soak the area in warm water
- Pump your fist
- Swing your limbs to increase circulation
- Drink plenty of water

Put a compress in the microwave for a short time. Place over the site you are going to inject. This will help veins rise and become more visible. A warm shower, or soaking your site in warm water, will also help your veins become easier to find. Make sure the water is not too hot. Exercising or squeezing a tennis ball increases blood circulation.



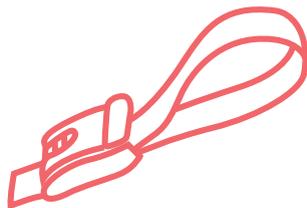
TOURNIQUETS

Your tourniquet should stretch so that when you pull it tightly, it doesn't damage your skin and it is easy to release once you have hit a vein.

If your tourniquet is applied too tightly, damage can be caused by the drug not being able to enter the blood stream.

After you put your tourniquet on, pump the muscle to get the vein up, and then swab the area you are going to inject with an alcohol swab. Swab in one direction only. Do not rub.

Don't pull your tourniquet too tight and ALWAYS release your tourniquet before you put your shot away.



Inserting the NEEDLE

When you have found a safe site for injecting, insert the needle with the bevel (hole) pointing up, into the skin parallel to the vein. The tip should be pointing in the same direction as the blood flow – toward your heart. Take care not to push the needle through the back wall of the vein. You are usually in a vein when dark red blood jacks back into the syringe. Release the tourniquet and slowly put your shot away. When the plunger hits the end of the barrel all of the drugs are out of the syringe. Jacking blood back into the syringe and putting it back into the vein does nothing but cause extra damage to your veins.

right way



wrong way



Good things to REMEMBER ARE...

- The SMALLER the needle gauge, the BIGGER the hole (a 22g leaves a much bigger hole than a 26g).
- You should always try to prevent injecting in the same place. Even a few millimetres may make a difference, giving your veins a chance to heal and stop them collapsing. **Once your veins have collapsed, they do not come back!**
- Citric acid is less damaging to your veins than vinegar or lemon juice. Lemon juice can carry fungal infections, which can affect the heart and eyes.
- The more diluted your shot, the better it is for your veins. Remember even if you are feeling sick put your shot away slowly. Take time to check the colour of the blood. If you do make the mistake of hitting an artery, putting it away slowly gives you the chance to pull out and start again. This is better than the alternative: not realising you've hit an artery until you pull out.
- Always use a wheel filter. Depending on the drugs you are using it may be necessary to use more than one. Ask your local exchange staff what filter to use with the drugs you are injecting.

Safer INJECTING

Injecting drugs may deliver a drug into your system faster than smoking, snorting, anal or oral administration. If you choose to inject drugs, remember it is dangerous. This guide aims to make injecting safer. Taking proper care of veins in your arms will stop you having to move to more dangerous sites like your fingers, groin or neck. Remember that staff at your local Needle Exchange Programme are always willing to help with advice. We do not judge, we only aim to keep you healthy in your chosen lifestyle.

You should always:

- make sure you wash and dry your hands thoroughly before injecting
- filter your drugs
- clean or swab the injection site before injecting
- use a clean needle and syringe for each injection
- use the right equipment
- check you are in a vein, not an artery
- put your injection away slowly
- apply pressure to site after injecting
- apply healing cream to immediate area, not the puncture mark



This injury was a result of injecting Temazepam

You should not:

- use a vein that is red and inflamed or has hardened
- inject in your penis
- inject temazepam (footballs)
- inject into an artery
- reuse, or share equipment
- inject with tourniquet unreleased

Other resources are available at your local New Zealand Needle Exchange or on www.nznep.org.nz.

For tips on injecting see the booklet called 'Injecting and your health'.

For information on overdose see the booklet called 'Overdose – what you need to do when someone hits the deck'

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- Look after your veins
 - Always filter your drugs properly
 - Rotate your injection sites
 - Clean or swab your injection sites
 - Always use new sterile needles and syringes



New Zealand
Needle Exchange
Programme

P O Box 22-176
Christchurch, New Zealand
Phone +64 3 366 9403
www.nznep.org.nz