

Frequently Asked Questions About Subcutaneous (SC) Administration

Are you considering SC injections to treat your cancer?

Here, you'll find answers to some key questions you may have about SC injections for your cancer treatment.



What is a subcutaneous (SC) injection?

The word “subcutaneous” (also known as SC, SQ, or subcut) means under the skin. An SC injection is a method of giving medicine, such as immunotherapy for your cancer, into the layer of fat that’s just under the skin. SC injections are usually given in the thigh or stomach area (abdomen) since those areas of the body are easier to get to and may have more fat. You may be familiar with medicines that are given as an injection, such as routine vaccination shots. Unlike a routine vaccination shot, SC cancer treatments are given over the span of a few minutes.



My cancer treatment is offered as both an SC injection and an intravenous (IV) infusion. What is the difference between them?

The SC injection has the same medicine as the IV infusion. The difference is how the medicine is given. With SC injections, medicine is delivered into the fat under the skin, while IV infusions deliver medicine directly into a vein. If your healthcare provider thinks switching to the SC injection is a good option for you, it doesn't mean the IV infusion wasn't working. The SC injection works just as well as the IV infusion to help treat your cancer, so the choice is yours based on your preference and a discussion with your caregiver and healthcare provider.



Will I need to give myself the SC injection?

No. A healthcare provider will give the SC injection, which can be delivered in a variety of clinical locations.



What are the potential benefits of SC injections?

SC injections may offer several benefits. For example:

- SC injections take approximately 2 to 8 minutes, while IV infusions can take 30 minutes or more
- SC injections can be delivered in a variety of locations, such as outpatient settings
- SC injections do not require use of a cannula (a thin tube inserted into the vein), which lowers the risk of IV-infusion related reactions



What are the side effects associated with SC injections?

The most common side effects of an SC injection would include “injection site reactions”, such as redness, itching, and swelling of the skin around the area you received the injection. There may be other side effects from the cancer medicine you are getting. It is helpful to review and discuss all possible side effects with your healthcare provider.



How are injection site reactions usually managed?

An injection site reaction is a type of side effect that you may have after getting an injection. Injection site reactions are usually managed by putting a cold compress on the area to lower swelling and discomfort. If needed, over-the-counter pain medication may also be used. If you experience side effects, contact your healthcare provider for more advice and treatment options.



Does my insurance cover SC injections or are there any other requirements?

If your healthcare provider thinks SC injections might be a good option for you, you can talk to them to find out what is covered by your insurance policy. You will also need to speak to your insurance provider to confirm if SC injections are covered by your policy.



If I have already started on IV infusions, can I switch to SC injections?

Usually, switching is possible from IV infusions to SC injections, depending on other treatments you may be getting, your personal preferences, and your healthcare provider's advice. It's important to discuss this with your healthcare provider if you're thinking about switching. First, your healthcare provider will look at your medical needs and conditions. After that, you and your healthcare provider can decide together if SC injections may be right for you. If SC injections are started, your healthcare provider will monitor your response to treatment to make sure the switch is right for your cancer treatment.



Will the dose and time between doses be the same for SC injections as it was for IV infusions?

The dose and time between doses for SC injections may differ from IV infusions and will depend on the type of cancer and other treatments you may be getting. Talk with your healthcare provider to learn more about dosing for SC injections.



Do I need a port for SC injections?

No. A port is not needed for SC injections because the injections are given into the fat under your skin.

If you already have a port, you may still be able to receive SC injections (which would not be given through the port). This is a conversation you can have with your healthcare provider to see if SC injections are right for you based on other treatments you may be getting and your preferences.



What should I expect before, during, and after an SC injection appointment?

To prepare for your appointment, your healthcare provider will ask you to wear loose, comfortable clothing so that the injection site is easy to reach.

During the actual injection, the healthcare provider will ask you to remain seated comfortably. The healthcare provider will also be seated next to you, to slowly give you the SC injection. First, the healthcare provider will decide where to inject the medication, usually the stomach area (abdomen) or thigh. Once that is done, they will pinch the skin and insert the needle to deliver the medicine.

After receiving your SC injection, you will be monitored for any side effects before being released.



How long does an SC injection usually take and where do I go to receive it?

An SC injection usually takes anywhere between 2 to 8 minutes for the injection administration, while IV infusions can take 30 minutes or more to administer. That time does not include everything that happens at the visit, such as check-in time, preparation time, and monitoring by healthcare staff. SC injections can be given in different clinical locations, which may give you flexibility in where you can get your treatment.



Are there clinical studies that looked at what other patients think of SC injections?

Several clinical studies have been done that asked if patients preferred SC injections, IV infusions, or had no preference for their cancer treatments. These studies were done in patients with different types of cancer and looked at different cancer treatments. The results showed that most patients preferred SC injections over IV infusions because they felt less pain and discomfort and they spent less time in the clinic with SC injections. While the results from these studies may be helpful in understanding some of the benefits of SC administration, both SC injections and IV infusions are options for your cancer treatment and your choice should be based on what is best for you.



Can SC injections be given with other cancer treatments?

Yes. SC injections can be given with other cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, oral therapies, and targeted treatments. It's important to work with your healthcare provider to make sure the combination of different treatments is safe and effective for your specific condition. Your healthcare provider will look at your treatment plan to make sure the medicine is working to treat your cancer, while managing any possible medicine interactions or side effects.



Who can I talk to if I have more questions?

You can talk to your healthcare provider or a specialist involved in your treatment for more information and to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about your medical condition and current treatment plan.

Glossary

Cannula: A thin tube that can be inserted into the vein, often used in medical settings for delivering medicine.

Chemotherapy: A type of cancer treatment that uses drugs that destroys cancer cells.

Immunotherapy: A type of cancer treatment that helps your body's own defense system, called the immune system, fight cancer.

Injection site reaction: Side effects occurring at the site where the injection is given, including redness, itching, or swelling.

Intravenous (IV) infusion: The delivery of a medicine directly into the bloodstream.

Oral therapies: Medicines that are taken by mouth.

Outpatient setting: A medical facility where patients receive care without being admitted to the hospital.

Port: A small medical appliance placed beneath the skin, used to access veins for treatment such as chemotherapy.

Subcutaneous (SC) injection: The delivery of a medicine into the layer of fat under the skin.

Targeted treatment: A type of cancer treatment that targets specific molecules that help cancer cells grow and spread.