

Heparin

Names The generic drug name is heparin (HEP-a-rin). Brand names include Liquaemin®, Panheparin®, and Lipo-Hepin®. There may be other brand names for this medication.

How is it Administered? Heparin is given intravenously (IV), which means it is given through a small catheter (tube) that has been placed in a vein. Heparin can also be injected just under the skin (subcutaneous injection).

Why Am I on Heparin and How Does it Work? Heparin is in a class of medications called anticoagulants (blood thinners). It works by decreasing the ability of the blood to clot. Heparin is given to prevent blood clots from forming in people who are at risk of developing blood clots due to a medical procedure or an underlying medical condition. If a blood clot has already formed in a blood vessel, heparin may be given to prevent it from getting larger. Heparin cannot be used to make an existing clot smaller. Heparin is also used in small amounts to prevent blood clots from forming inside intravenous catheters.

What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin? Tell your doctor if you:

- have ever had an allergic reaction to heparin, beef, pork, other medications, foods, preservatives, or dyes
- have or have ever had any type of a bleeding disorder; have a low level of platelets or bleeding that cannot be stopped
- have a fever, infection, ulcers, high blood pressure, liver disease, or a tube that drains your stomach or intestines
- recently had a spinal tap (lumbar puncture); spinal anesthesia, heart attack, or surgery
- currently have your menstrual period, are pregnant, or are breastfeeding
- have had a thrombocytopenic reaction to a previous use of heparin or formed new blood clots while on heparin

These drugs can interact with other medications. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal, or diet supplements that you take.

What Are Some Possible Side Effects?

- Redness, pain, bruising, or soreness at the injection site
- Mild itching of feet
- Bluish-colored skin

When Should I Call the Doctor?

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you have signs of a severe allergic reaction (swelling, tingling in your face, mouth, tongue or throat; chest tightness; trouble breathing; dizziness; heart palpitations; hives.) Let your doctor know you have gone to the ER or been admitted.

Let your doctor or nurse know immediately if you have:

- unusual bruising or bleeding such as bleeding lasts more than 10-15 minutes or that causes dizziness; black or bloody stools; vomit that is bloody or that looks like coffee grounds; blood in your urine or phlegm /mucus, unusually heavy menstrual bleeding, spontaneous bleeding from your gums or nose, or superficial bleeding into the skin (a rash of pinpoint-sized reddish-purple spots)
- any sign of a blood clot: sudden numbness or weakness, severe headache, slurred speech, vision or speech problems, chest pain, sudden cough, wheezing, swelling or warmth in one of both legs
- severe pain in stomach, lower back, or groin
- swelling or bruising in your lower stomach or groin area
- nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite
- unusual tiredness
- fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, chills, runny nose, watery eyes
- trouble breathing

What Else Should I Know About Heparin?

- Tell all your doctors and dentists that you are using heparin.
- Tell your doctor if you smoke or use tobacco products and if you stop smoking at any time during your treatment with heparin.
- If you become pregnant while using heparin, call your doctor.
- If you are using these injections at home, make sure you understand your dose and schedule, and how to give the injection.
- Your doctor should check your progress at regular visits. They make take a blood test to check on clotting and adjust your dose.
- Hair loss may occur with long-term use.
- For more information, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.