Patient Education

Heparin (HEP-a-rin)

Brand Names
Calciparine®, Liquaemin®, Panheparin®, 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. Alternatively, heparin may be given as a subcutaneous (under the skin) injection.

What is it Used For?
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, however, be used to make an existing clot smaller. Heparin is also used in small amounts to prevent blood clots from forming inside intravenous catheters.

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.

What Should I Tell My Doctor Before I Begin Receiving Heparin?
Tell your doctor if you:
• have ever had an allergic reaction to heparin, beef, pork, other medications, foods, preservatives, or dyes
• are pregnant or breastfeeding
• have a low level of platelets or bleeding that cannot be stopped
• are currently experiencing your menstrual period, a fever, or an infection
• recently had a spinal tap (lumbar puncture); spinal anesthesia, heart attack, or surgery (particularly brain, spinal cord, or eye surgery)
• have ever had any type of a bleeding disorder such as hemophilia; ulcers; a tube that drains your stomach or intestines; high blood pressure; or liver disease
• have had a thrombocytopenic reaction to a previous use of heparin
• have had new blood clots form while taking heparin

This drug may interact with other medications, increasing or decreasing their effectiveness or causing harmful side effects. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any prescription or over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbal or diet supplements that you are taking.

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What Are Some Possible Side Effects I May Experience?

- Redness, pain, bruising, or sores at the injection site

When Should I Call the Doctor?

Let your doctor or nurse know immediately if you experience any of the following:

- unusual bruising or bleeding: 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 that appears as a rash of pinpoint-sized reddish-purple spots (petechiae)

- any sign of an allergic reaction: itching or hives, swelling in your face or hands, swelling or tingling in your mouth or throat, chest tightness, trouble breathing, dizziness, palpitations, nausea, vomiting, and/or hypotension (drop in blood pressure)

- chest pain, pressure, or squeezing discomfort; discomfort in your arms, shoulder, jaw, neck, or back; chills; fever; and/or excessive sweating

- sudden severe headache, lightheadedness, fainting, loss of balance or coordination, confusion, or trouble walking; sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body; sudden difficulty speaking or understanding speech; difficulty seeing in one or both eyes

- itching and burning, especially on the bottoms of the feet

- excessive tiredness

Call your doctor as soon as possible if you experience any of the following:

- irritation, pain, redness, or ulcers at place of injection

- numbness or tingling in hands or feet

- pain, coldness, or blue color in the skin on your arms or legs

- frequent or persistent erections

- peeling skin or tearing in your eyes

- back pain, rib pain, or loss of height (with long-term use only)
What Else Should I Know About Heparin?

- If you are having surgery, including dental surgery, tell the doctor or dentist 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.
- Since many things can affect the way your body reacts to this medicine, you should always watch for any signs or symptoms of unusual bleeding, which may mean that your body is getting more heparin than it needs.
- If you are using these injections at home, make sure your doctor has explained exactly how this medicine is to be given. Be certain that you are using the right strength and the right amount of heparin, and that you use it according to schedule.
- Your doctor should check your progress at regular visits. A simple blood test must be taken regularly to see how fast your blood is clotting. Results of these tests are used to adjust your dose.
- Hair loss may occur with long-term use.
- If you would like more information about heparin, talk to your doctor.