

# Heparin: What You Need To Know

## What is Heparin?

It is an anticoagulant. This means it helps reduce clots from forming in your blood.

## Why Do You Need Heparin?

- Your health care provider wants you to take heparin because your body may make clots that you don't need.
- These clots can cause a serious medical problem. A clot can move to another part of your body. For example, if a clot moves to your brain, it can cause a stroke.

## How Much Heparin Do You Need?

- Each person responds in a different way to heparin. You will be watched closely to make sure you are getting the right amount.
- Blood tests will be done often to measure the amount of time it takes your blood to clot.

## What Are the Side Effects of Heparin?

- Sometimes, heparin can cause bleeding in the kidneys or digestive system. Your urine and stools will be checked for any signs of blood loss.
- Obvious signs of bleeding may include:
  - a bloody nose
  - bleeding gums
  - heavy menstrual flow
  - a cut or wound that takes a long time to stop bleeding
  - bruising that is not related to an injury.

If you see any of these side effects, tell your nurse or health care provider. The amount of medicine you receive can be adjusted to reduce or get rid of these symptoms.

## What Else Should You Know?

- Treat yourself gently. Avoid bumps and bruises. Use a toothbrush with soft bristles.
- Avoid sharp objects. Use an electric razor instead of a razor blade.
- Don't take a chance on falling. Wear slippers or shoes with non-slip soles. Ask for help when getting out of bed.

## When Should You Call Your Nurse or Health Care Provider?

Call your nurse or health care provider right away if you:

- have a serious fall or if you hit your head
- have bleeding that does not stop from cuts or from your nose
- have more bleeding than usual when you brush your teeth
- have more bleeding than usual when you get your menstrual period or if you have unexpected bleeding from your vagina
- have unusual colored urine or stool (including dark brown urine and red or black in your stool)

*(over)*

- have unusual bruising (black and blue marks on your skin) for unknown reasons
- cough or throw up blood, have diarrhea (loose, runny stools) or if you have an infection
- have a headache, dizziness, trouble breathing, chest pain or if you feel weak or more tired than usual.