

# How to Administer Injectable Medication To Your Cat

- Most injectable medications given at home are administered by injection directly under the skin (known as *subcutaneous injection*).
- Do not risk being bitten, scratched, or otherwise injured trying to medicate your pet. If you are unable to administer medication, your veterinarian may be able to offer other options.
- Your veterinary health care team will work with you to make sure you know how to give injectable medication without injuring yourself or your cat.

## Why Does My Cat Need Injectable Medication?

Certain medications, such as insulin, can only be administered by injection. Depending on the formulation and the type of medication, injectable medications can be given by several routes. They can be given through direct injection into a vein (known as intravenous, or *IV*, injection), injection into a muscle (known as intramuscular, or *IM* injection), or injection directly under the skin—a procedure known as subcutaneous (*SC* or *SQ*) injection. It is very important that you understand how your pet's injectable medication needs to be given; for example, if you accidentally give a medication intravenously instead of subcutaneously, complications can result. Most injectable medications given at home are intended to be given subcutaneously.

## Getting Started

Before you start, ask your veterinary health care team for training and advice so you know how to give injectable medication without injuring yourself or your cat. If you aren't comfortable or need additional training sessions, don't be afraid to ask!

Here are a few things to consider:

- ***Be sure you can handle your cat without being injured.*** This may not be an issue if your cat is very relaxed and is used to being handled. However, if you have had problems in the past trying to trim nails or perform other procedures on your cat, you may need help giving medication by injection. Talk to your veterinary care team about tips for properly restraining your cat for medication injections before attempting your first session. In some cases, you may need another person to help hold your cat so you can safely give the injection.
- ***Don't be afraid to ask questions.*** Your team of veterinary professionals will be glad to answer any questions you may have about safely administering medication injections to your cat.

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- ***Record your cat's medication schedule on the calendar.*** Include the date and time that the medication needs to be administered. This will help you to avoid forgetting to give a dose to your cat and to remember when the course of treatment is completed.
- ***If you can't do it, ask about other options.*** Giving medication injections to a cat requires skill, patience, and confidence. If you aren't comfortable trying to give injections at home, ask your veterinary team if the injections can be done at your veterinarian's office. For

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long-term therapy (such as insulin), this may require a prolonged time commitment. For short-term medication, however, outpatient injections can be a very practical option.

### Basic Equipment

The “syringe” is the clear (usually plastic) cylinder that holds the medication to be injected. The “needle” is the sharp, metal tip that is injected into the skin. The “plunger” is a stem that moves inside the syringe. Pull the plunger backward to fill the syringe and push it forward to empty the syringe. A new needle/plunger and syringe are sterile until they are opened. The bottle of injectable medication is also sterile. It is important to handle these items properly to avoid contaminating them. Your veterinary care team will show you how to properly open a syringe and draw up injectable medication without breaking sterility. Be sure to use a new syringe, plunger, and needle for each injection. Reusing syringes and needles can cause infection. Additionally, a used needle is dull and therefore more painful than a new needle.

### Proper Restraint

Some cats are happy lying or sitting on your lap while you administer the medication injection. However, you should place a towel or blanket across your lap (to avoid getting scratched) in case your cat tries to jump down. Some cats do better on a smooth surface, such as a table; the surface of a washing machine can simulate the smooth metal table at your veterinarian’s office and encourage your cat to remain still during the procedure. Additionally, some cats do better with two people administering the injection—one person to hold the cat and the other one to give the injection.

### Giving a Subcutaneous Injection

Your veterinary care team will show you how to administer an injection before you have to try it alone at home:

- Maintaining sterility, load the syringe with medication and set it close by.
- Find an area of loose skin. The skin over the

middle of the back or just behind the shoulders generally works well. If the injection will be given frequently (as with insulin), try to alternate injection sites so you are not using the same location each time.

- Gently pinch a section of loose skin between your thumb and forefinger. When you pull the loose skin gently upwards, you should see a small indentation of skin between your fingers.
- Holding the syringe in the opposite hand, insert the sterile needle directly into the indentation. Keep the needle level (or parallel) with the surface of the skin on the back. If you angle the needle too much, you may enter a muscle, go through the skin to the opposite side, or stick your own finger.

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- Once the needle has been inserted, pull back on the plunger only. If you see blood, remove the needle and try a different location. If not, push the plunger forward to empty the syringe.
- When the syringe is empty, remove the needle (backing out along the same path that was used to enter the skin).
- If there is no bleeding or leakage of medication, release the cat after giving him or her a big hug for being a good patient!
- Be sure to dispose of used needles and syringes properly.

### Giving an Intramuscular Injection

There are a few precise areas on the body that are commonly used for giving intramuscular injections. You will need to find “landmarks” on your cat so that you know where to give the injection. Your veterinary care team will show you how to find an appropriate injection site and administer an

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intramuscular injection before you have to try it alone at home:

- Maintaining sterility, load the syringe with medication and set it close by.
- Find the injection site, using the techniques your veterinarian demonstrated for you. If the injection will be given frequently, try to alternate injection sites so you are not using the same location each time.
- Holding the syringe in one hand, insert the sterile needle directly through the skin and into the underlying muscle. The angle of the needle should be between 45° and 90°, depending on the injection site. If your angle is too shallow, you may not inject deeply enough to enter a muscle.
- Once the needle has been inserted, pull back on the plunger only. If you see blood, remove the needle and try a different location. If not, push the plunger forward to empty the syringe.
- When the syringe is empty, remove the needle (backing out along the same path that was used to enter the skin).
- If there is no bleeding or leakage of medication, release the cat after giving him or her a big hug for being a good patient!
- Be sure to dispose of used needles and syringes properly.

**Ask your veterinary team to teach you how to administer medication injections safely. If you aren't comfortable giving injections, ask about scheduling outpatient visits for the injections to be given.**