**What are the safest veins to use?**

- The safer zone is between the elbow and the wrist. The veins below the elbow bend are larger and easier to use.
- Arm veins are the safest distance from your heart. Jugging is not safe. The jugular is close to your heart and could cause OD, blood clots to your lungs, heart attack or death. You could also hit the nerve which runs along the jugular and cause your face to become numb.
- Leg veins are too far from the heart. The body has to work harder to return blood from the lower limbs. The slower blood return means a greater risk for infections, blood clots and leg wounds.

**Where should I inject in my body?**

**Safer:**
- Lower arm, upper arm. Avoid joints and hands.

**Less Safe:**
- Legs.

**Risky:**
- Feet, ankles, groin, back of the legs.

**Very Risky:**
- Neck, breast, penis, eye, forehead.

**What is the safest way for me to inject?**

- **Never Use Alone.** Fix in a place you feel safe, where you don't have to rush and where someone can look after you.
- Know your dealer.
- Have enough light in the room in which you are fixing to better see your veins and prevent missing. Side-lights and mirrors can help.
- Wash your hands and injection area. This will greatly reduce the chance of bacteria getting into your body. Unbroken skin is the greatest protection against infection.
- Gather together all the equipment you will need for a safer fix. This includes a sterile needle, clean water, an alcohol swab, a filter and a tourniquet. Take a sharps container home.

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**Vein Care for Injection Drug Users**

We want to help reduce the health risks of injecting drugs. Injecting drugs is always risky. We have written the following guide to help make injection safer.

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**Other Brochures in the Harm Reduction Learning Series**

- crack (rock) cocaine
- safer injecting information for drug users
- common infections from injection drug use
- coping with triggers
- o.d. overdose, crashing
- the safer fix

The Harm Reduction Learning Series is a joint project of the Dr. Peter Centre, Vancouver Coastal Health, and the psl. Supported in part by an unrestricted educational grant from Abbott Laboratories.

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about veins and arteries

Veins have different sizes and shapes, but all serve the same purpose. They carry blood from your body back to your heart and lungs. In your lungs, blood is cleaned and collects oxygen. Clean blood is carried back out through our bodies by arteries.

The blood in our veins is thick and bluish-red in colour. In our arteries, the blood is thinner and bright red in colour. Blood from our veins clots easily, and will stop bleeding with less direct pressure than our arteries.

Veins have lots of valves to help the blood flow back up into the heart. Arteries have a pulse. They carry blood quickly and at high pressure.

Regular exercise will keep muscles strong. This helps keep veins big and healthy.

How about when I am using?
Take a warm bath or a shower. Wrap your arm in a warm towel or blanket for a few minutes. Heat will increase blood flow and the size of your veins.
Use in a warm, safe place so you don’t have to hurry. Take a big breath before you inject.
Try to use a different part of the vein every time. Rotate your injection sites. Move an up the arm. This prevents loss of the vein forever from overuse in one area.

Start with the vein closest to the wrist and work up the arm. If part of the vein is collapsed or scarred, you lose the use of the vein below that spot.
Go with the flow! Inject in the direction of the bloodflow which in a vein is towards your heart. Never inject towards your fingers or toes!
Open and close your fist to pump up your veins before using. Always use a tie to expand the vein.

Feel your vein before injecting into it. Just because you can see it on the surface of your skin it doesn’t mean the vein has enough blood in it.
Look for the valves in your veins and inject above them. To see a valve, look for bumps or fuller areas in the vein, or places where veins change direction.
Injecting above valves will pump the drug faster. It will also help prevent circulation problems, scar tissue and possible infections.

Always use clean supplies and inject with care.

questions and answers

How can I tell whether I have hit a vein or an artery?
Veins are generally visible and near the surface of your skin.
Arteries are deeper but when they come close to the skin surface, they have a pulse. When you hit a vein, dark blood will seep from your body.
When you hit an artery, bright red blood will spurt. Never inject where you have a pulse.

Why is vein care important for injection drug users?
Injection drug use is hard on the veins. If you inject a lot, your veins could collapse or develop scar tissue and you won’t be able to use them anymore. As well, when veins collapse, the risk of skin injuries and body-wide infections goes up.

How do I keep my veins healthy?
To keep veins healthy, drink lots of fluids. Water is good. Coffee and alcohol don’t count. They will cause your veins to shrink and dehydrate your body.

We want to help reduce health risks of injecting drugs. Injecting drugs is always risky. We have written this guide to help make injection safer.

A word about Up.

Crystal meth, cocaine and other stimulants cause veins to shrink. The brain goes into 'action mode', which makes the heart beat faster and the veins shrink. Using up makes veins harder to find.

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