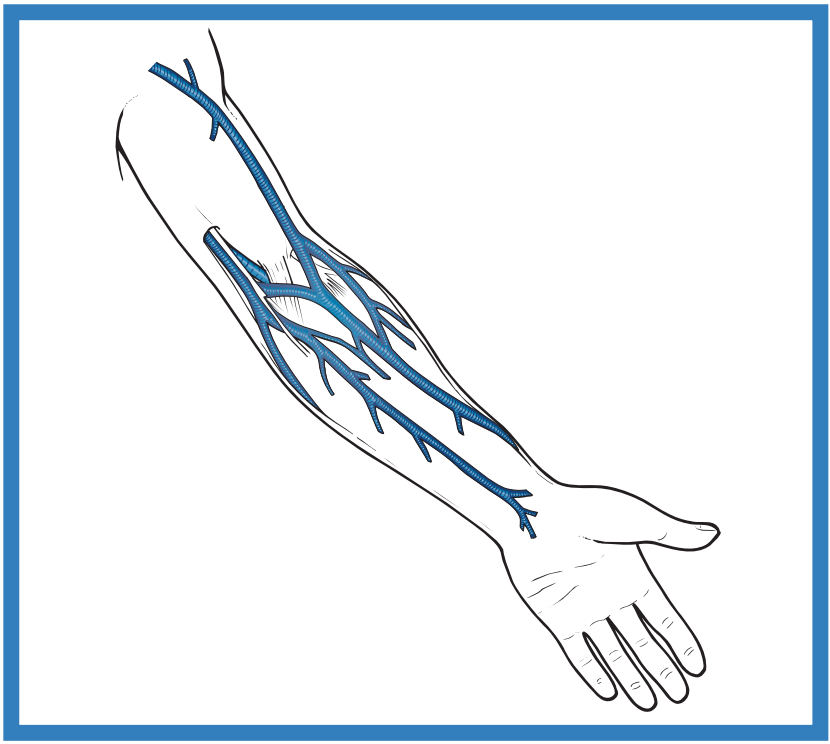
Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

Taking your own blood

Information for patients
Hepatitis Clinic



In hospital and in the community
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We have written this leaflet to give you some important information about taking your own blood sample. If after reading it you are unsure about anything you have read, please do not hesitate to talk about this with your supervising nurse or doctor. They will be able to answer any questions or concerns that you have.

Why have you asked me to take my own blood?

We need a blood sample from you so that we can do one or more things. Using a blood sample we can:

- Check whether any conditions are present
- Identify conditions
- See how your condition is affecting your body
- See if your treatment is working

Whilst with most patients we can usually take blood samples quite easily, we may have problems with other people. This is especially the case where veins are difficult to get to or where they may collapse. Where this is the case it is sometimes better for patients who are experienced in the use of needles ('pins') and syringes ('barrels'), and who are familiar with how to get at their veins, to take their own blood samples.

How much blood will I need to get?

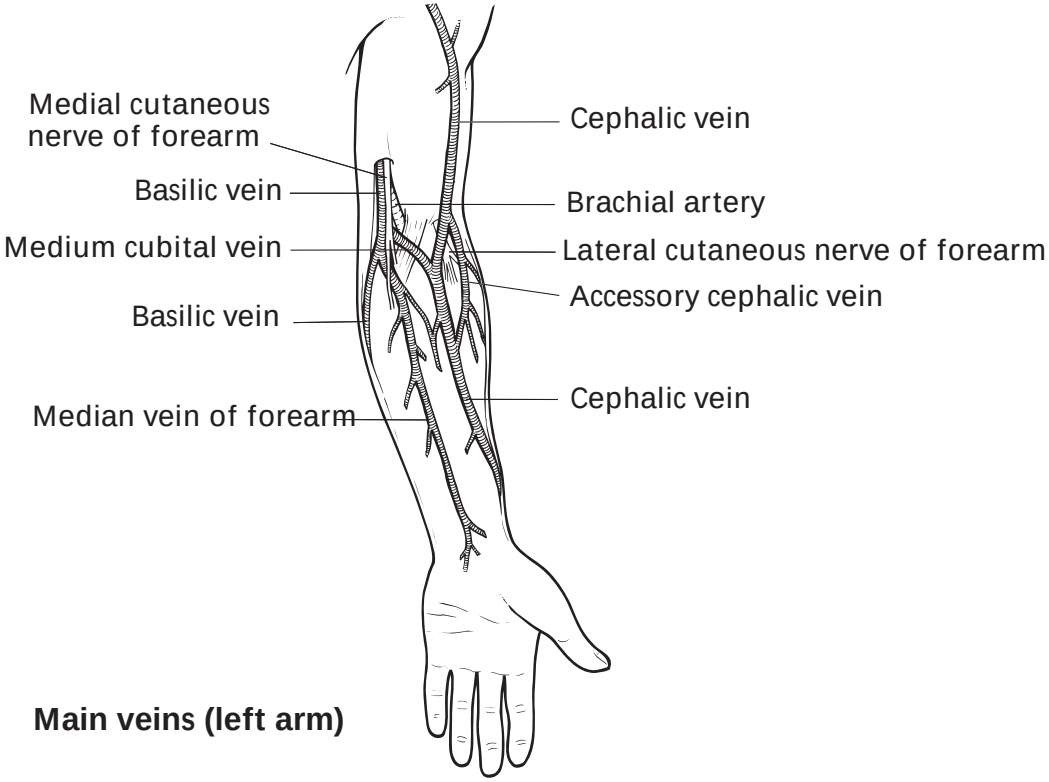
This will depend on why we are taking your blood and the number of tests that need to be done.

- To screen for and to identify a condition, and/or to see if treatment is working, a medium sized syringe (equal to 10 millilitres) is usually needed.
- Where we want to see how a condition is affecting your body, then more tests will be necessary, and a large syringe (equal to 20 millilitres) is used.

Do I have to do anything before I take my own blood?

First, please read this leaflet all the way through to make sure that you are satisfied you know how to take your own blood and that you are aware of the risks involved. Next, the nurse or doctor supervising you will ask you to sign a 'patient agreement form' (which will be kept in your notes). This confirms that you have read this leaflet and that you have been given sterile equipment. It is very **important** that you tell your nurse or doctor if you are taking any medication to 'thin' your blood (usually given to treat a blood clot) because if you are, it will take longer to stop the leakage of blood after you take a sample.

Where should I take my blood from?



Main veins (left arm)

The veins in the arm (below the armpit and above the wrist) are the best sites for taking blood because they lie just under the surface of the skin, and are wider with thicker walls. Also, the skin in this area tends to be less sensitive.

Where should I avoid taking blood from?

If you are taking blood from your arm be careful to avoid the brachial artery (the main artery of the upper arm). You should also avoid using veins that:

- Cross joints and bone, with little skin and fat, such as inside the wrist and fingers, as these can be more painful
- Are red and inflamed, painful to touch and in areas of bruised or broken skin.

Taking blood from your groin should be a last resort, because the veins are hidden and this means you would have to insert the needle blind.

How should I take my own blood?

To help you take your own blood sample safely we will give you the following equipment in a clean disposable tray:

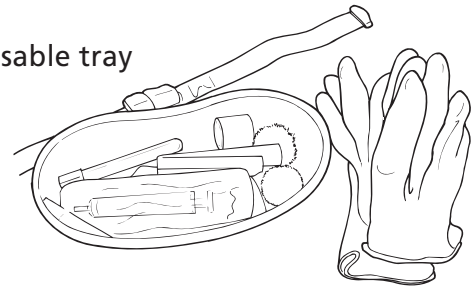
- Sterile syringe
- Sterile needle - the size will be the smallest possible to prevent damage to the vein but will also depend on where you are going to take the blood from.
- Sterile antiseptic swab
- Cotton wool balls
- Tourniquet
- Sterile plaster and/or allergy free tape

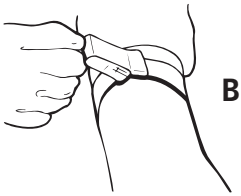
The nurse or doctor supervising you will take you into a private room.

Taking your own blood involves carrying out several steps in an orderly manner:

1. Spend time choosing which vein is most likely to allow you to get an adequate blood sample at the first attempt
2. Wash your hands to prevent the risk of infection
3. Put on a pair of sterile disposable gloves
4. Attach the needle to the syringe
5. Apply the tourniquet to the upper part of the limb
6. Carefully feeling with your hands and fingertips, examine the area to find a suitable vein (it should be firm and bouncy)
7. Clean the area with a disinfectant swab and leave it to dry for 30 seconds
8. Following the line of the vein, smoothly insert the needle at an angle of 30 to 45 degrees, with the eye of it facing upwards to make sure that the sharp point of the needle pierces the skin. As soon as you see blood where the needle is connected to the syringe, lower the syringe towards the skin and pull on the syringe's plunger
9. Once the blood has been collected, release the tourniquet and cover the needle with cotton wool, but do not apply pressure until you have removed the needle slowly, as this causes unnecessary pain and damage to the vein.
10. Place the needle and syringe in the disposable tray
11. Apply firm pressure for 1 - 2 minutes (3 - 4 minutes if you are on medication to 'thin' your blood). This stops you bruising.

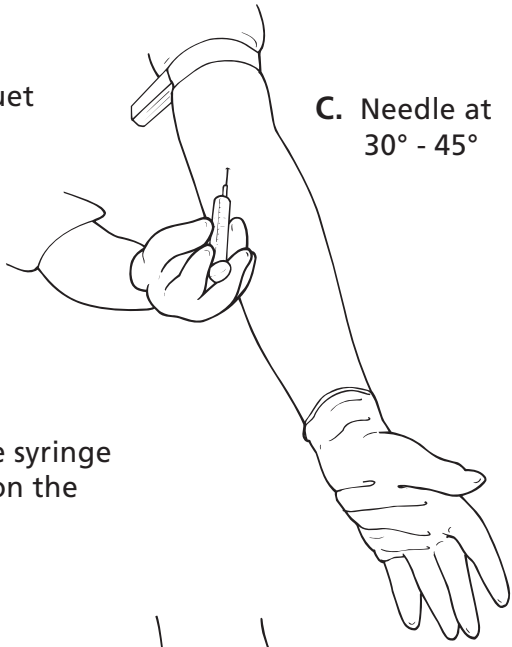
A. Disposable tray



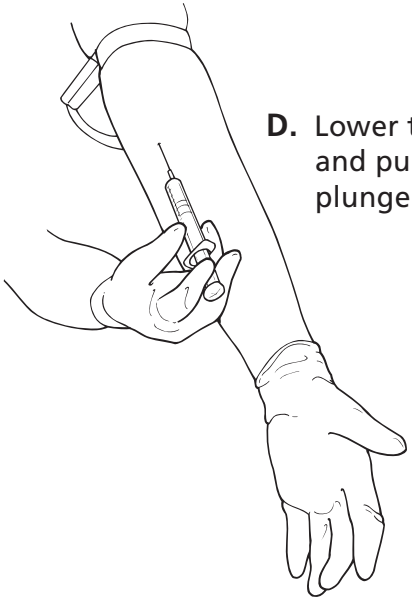


B. Apply tourniquet

C. Needle at 30° - 45°



D. Lower the syringe and pull on the plunger



E. Apply pressure after removing needle

What risks should I be aware of?

You must remember that arteries and nerves are also found near the sites of veins, notably at the elbow and in the groin.

If you hit an artery:

- It may spasm (constrict) and you will feel pain down your arm or leg
- It may cause blood to collect within the tissues and clot to form a solid swelling. This may put pressure on the nerves causing your limb to tingle
- You will see bright red blood rushing into the syringe and pushing the plunger up. If this happens, you must take out the needle ('pin'), raise your limb and apply firm pressure for at least 5 minutes to stop the bleeding. The nurse or doctor present in the room (already wearing gloves) will take over should this happen

If you hit a nerve you:

- Will be in a lot of pain and the procedure will have to be stopped immediately
- Can be left with a permanent loss of feeling in your limb or even paralysis

Using the same vein every time may cause it to collapse.

Remember: Veins need to rest and it is important to alternate sites. Feeling for veins can be a good way of finding new ones.

How should I get rid of used equipment?

After taking the blood sample, put the needle and syringe into the yellow 'sharps' bin provided. Any equipment that has your blood on it, for example, cotton wool, must be put in the yellow waste bag. There will be one in the room.

What happens if I cannot get enough blood?

If after two attempts you can't get enough blood, then the nurse or doctor will ask you to stop. If you are able to continue then the nurse or doctor will take the samples themselves. If you are unable to carry on then they will arrange for you to return to the clinic at another time.

How will I get the results of my blood tests?

We will ask you to return to the clinic. Please make an appointment at the reception desk. We do not give results out over the phone or by letter.

What happens if I change my mind about taking my own blood?

If you decide that after all you do not want to take your own blood, the nurse or doctor will do it for you.

What if I would like any more information?

If you would like to know more about taking your own blood or would like anything explained in more detail then please talk to any of the nurses in the clinic.

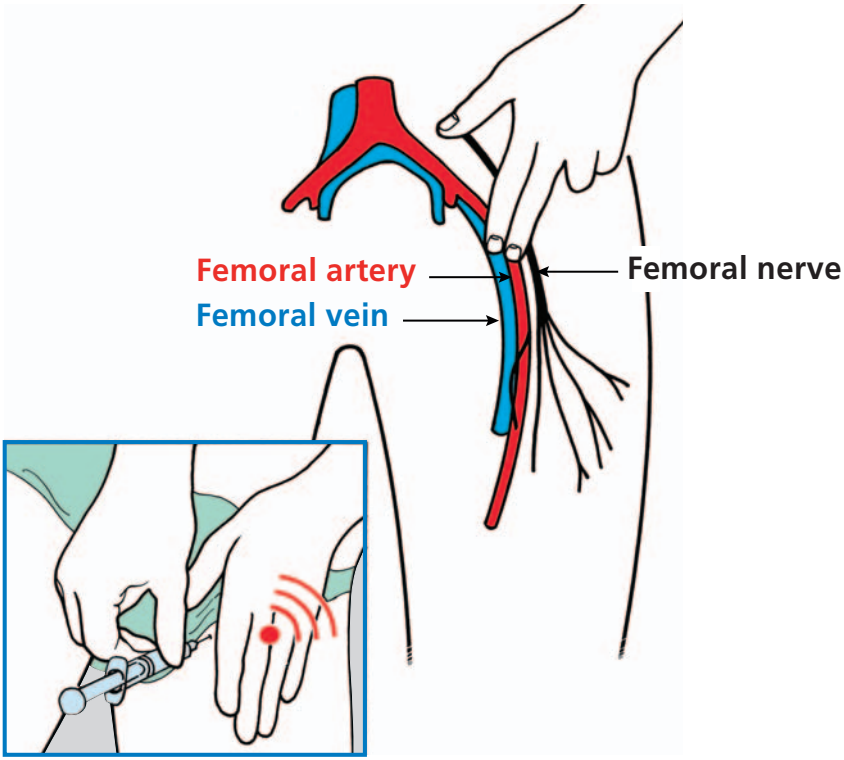
What if I want to take blood from my groin?

Going into your groin may cause infection and a blood clot (DVT) in your leg. It is a potentially hazardous procedure and should only ever be a last resort.

The following steps will not guarantee that you hit the femoral vein, but will make it less likely that you accidentally hit the artery or nerve:

1. Use the correct needle (either a blue or green hub depending on the amount of fat and tissue between the skin surface and the femoral vein).
2. Put your finger on your groin until you find a pulse. The pulse belongs to your artery. **Do not** insert the needle here. Put your middle finger there and keep it there.
3. Put your index finger tightly alongside your middle finger, and choose a site for taking blood towards the centre of your body, immediately next to your index finger.
4. Go in straight, not at an angle. Insert the needle 3/4 of the way so it can be removed easier if it snaps.
5. If you accidentally hit the femoral artery:

- Remove the needle
- Apply firm pressure to the site for between 5 - 15 minutes
- The nurse or doctor present in the room (already wearing gloves) will take over the procedure.


Femoral artery
Femoral vein
Femoral nerve

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