

# Health Education Fact Sheet

*From Nurses for You*

*Nursing Best  
Practice Guideline*

## You and Your IV

### Did you know that more than 90% of patients in the hospital will need infusion (IV) therapy?

#### *What is infusion/IV therapy?*

Infusion therapy is also known as intravenous or IV therapy. It is a way to give fluids, drugs, nutrition or blood and blood products to a person using special hollow tubes called “catheters”. IV therapy may last for as little as a few days to as long as many months, depending on your health.

The catheter may be put into a vein in your:

- hands;
- arms; or
- chest.

IV therapy may be used to help newborns, children and adults in:

- hospitals;
- clinics;
- long-term care homes; and
- in the community.

#### *Types of IV therapy*

Your nurse will talk to you, your family and your other caregivers about the types of IV devices that may be used in your care. Your nurse can help you decide what is best for you.

This choice will depend on the treatment you receive, the length of your treatment, your medical health, your health history and who will be caring for you during this time. Choosing the best device for you can ensure better comfort, a shorter hospital stay, fewer emergency room visits and lower health care costs. Using the best device will also reduce problems and prevent injury to the veins in your arms/hands.

#### *What do I need to know before I get an IV?*

To prevent infection, your nurse will:

- Wash his/her hands;
- Assess your risk for getting an infection;
- Screen your family and friends for illness to protect you from getting sick;
- Clean your skin with a special cleaner before putting in the catheter;



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- Clean around your catheter and change your dressing often; and
- Teach you and others how to care for the catheter if you are going to have IV therapy at home.

*Your health care team will guide your plan for IV therapy by:*

- Helping select the best IV device for you;
- Knowing the drugs you are taking;
- Checking with you often to see how your treatment is going and the progress you are making towards improved health.

*What to look for when you have an IV catheter*

If you are in the **hospital**, it is important to tell your nurse or care provider as soon as possible if you notice:

- The dressing is soaked with blood or clear fluid;
- The dressing is lifting off;
- The area around your catheter is puffy or swollen;
- The area around your catheter is red and painful;
- The bag is empty;
- The tubing becomes disconnected; or
- (If you are connected to an infusion pump) the pump is beeping or the low battery light is on.

If you are undergoing IV therapy at **home**, your nurse will teach you or your caregiver what to do if any problems arise from your IV and/or infusion pump.

If you have a strange heart beat or trouble breathing, it is important that you receive medical help quickly. Call your nurse or care provider if you are in a health care centre or 9-1-1 at any other time.



The intent of this fact sheet is to get you involved in decisions affecting your health. You can find this fact sheet on our website for free download. To find out more about our fact sheets and guidelines, please visit our website at [www.rnao.org/bestpractices](http://www.rnao.org/bestpractices).



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