

**KEEPING FIT:  
A Prisoner's Guide to Syringe Care**

by PASAN & 'Charlie'



**In a perfect world, no one would ever have to share a rig.**

Never sharing fits is the best way to protect yourself from getting HIV or Hep C. But in prison, we know this is not an option.

***If you share works (needle, cooker / spoon, filter), you are at high risk for HIV and Hep C infection.***

Using a fit over and over again also means that you are at greater risk for other infections, abscesses, and vein problems. Using a brand new rig for every hit means that the needle will be clean and sharp, and it means you are not at risk of getting HIV or Hep C. But new fits are hard to get in prison, and you don't have needle exchange programs like you do on the street. Even if you are offered a "new" rig in prison, you can never be 100% sure it's really clean. This means that if you are an injection drug user in prison, you probably have to share rigs, or use your own rig over and over again. This situation is not your fault. Maybe you never shared a fit in your life until you came to jail. Even though sharing fits is high risk for getting infected with HIV and Hep C, there are steps you can take to help reduce your risk.

**If you have your own rig that you want to make last as long as possible, there are also things you can do to make it last.**

### **SHARPENING YOUR POINT**

Each time the needle is used, the point gets a little duller. The duller the point is, the harder it is to shoot, and the more damage you do to your veins. You can try to keep your points sharp by sharpening them. You can use 220 grit or finer sandpaper, if you can get it. You can also use the striking pad from a book of matches, or an emery nail-file board. Make sure to try and keep a good angle on the point when you sharpen it. One thing to be careful of is that when you sharpen the point, a burr can form on the end on the needle. If a burr forms, it can make it hard to get the needle into vein. There's also the potential of the burr breaking off in your vein, which is really

dangerous. To get rid of the burr, turn the needle over and rub it gently along the sharpening surface. This should take it off. By running the tip over your fingernail, you should be able to tell if its gone.

## **PLUGGED OR BLOCKED NEEDLE**

If you use a fit more than one time, you'll probably have problems with the needle getting plugged or blocked. If you shoot morphine, you'll probably experience this more often.

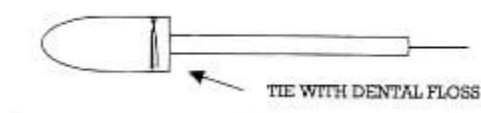
A good way to unplug the needle is to use a thin piece of wire. The power cables on TVs, radios, and lamps are made up of a lot of little thin wires all wound together. If you can get a piece of this kind of wire and strip it, you can unwind one of the thin pieces from the cable. You can thread this up into the needle to unblock it. It takes patience, but it will work. Trimming the end of the wire at an angle using a razor blade will help make it easier.

## **BROKEN PLUNGER**

The more times you use a fit, the more the plunger starts to wear down. This is extra true if you are using bleach to clean the syringe (see over), since the bleach is harsh on the rubber parts. This doesn't mean you should stop using bleach, but it does mean you may need to repair your plunger.

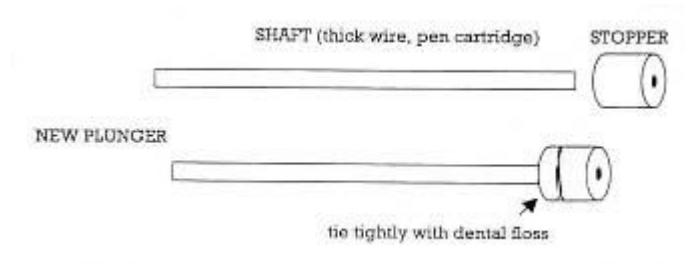
When the rubber stopper on the plunger begins to wear out or come off, you can fix it by tying dental floss around it. If you tie it tight enough, this will keep the rubber stopper on the plunger a while longer.

Another option is to use the rubber "squeezer" top from an eyedropper as a substitute for the plunger. Simply remove the bulb from the eyedropper, remove the plunger from the syringe, and place the bulb over the end of the syringe. Tie it with dental floss to ensure a tight fit.



You can also build a brand new plunger if the original one breaks. You need something to use as the plunger shaft. You can use a stiff, heavy piece of wire (like coat- hanger wire) or you can use the ink cartridge from a ball- point pen (just make sure you drain the ink out of it first). You can also re- use the original plunger shaft, if only the stopper part has broken.

You will also need something to make the rubber stopper. You need a piece of rubber that can be cut into the same shape and size as the original stopper. The rubber has to be pretty firm so it makes a tight seal in the barrel of the syringe (otherwise it won't draw). Rubber ear- plugs are a good source (NOT the spongy kind). Once you've trimmed the rubber to size, you need to make a hole down the centre so that it will fit over the end of the shaft. Then you have to tie it on. You can use dental floss, but make sure it's tight. Before putting the new plunger into the barrel of the syringe, grease the stopper with a little vaseline, as this will make it slide better. Now that it's together, test it to make sure it draws water.



If you have to share a rig, the best way to protect yourself from HIV or Hep C is to clean the rig with bleach.

### USING BLEACH

**Bleach is not 100% effective in killing the HIV virus, AND DOES NOT KILL HEP C.** Still, if you don't have a brand new fit, using bleach is the best option to protect yourself.

Rinse the fit with water by drawing water all the way up to the top of the barrel, then squirting it down the drain. Do this twice. Then do the same with the bleach. **The bleach must be full strength to work best.** Draw the bleach up to the top of the barrel, and shake it around for 30 seconds. Squirt the bleach down the drain. Do this again. **Do not squirt the dirty bleach back into the bottle.** Then rinse the syringe 2 times again with new water, as in step 1.

If you can't get bleach, you can use other disinfectants or cleansers that might be available. **This is not nearly as effective as bleach, but can reduce the risk of HIV transmission.** If you have time to take the rig apart after you've cleaned it, and let it dry in the air, this can also help reduce your risk.

If you have none of these options, you can flush the fit with warm soapy water. Like with using disinfectants and cleaners, you should try to take the syringe apart and let it dry in the air after cleaning it.

**Get in the habit of always rinsing your rig right after you've used it (using bleach, or whatever you have available). If you rinse it right away - before the blood has a chance to dry out inside the fit - your cleaning system will be much more effective.**

