

Helping you cope with needle phobia, during treatments that require injections or infusions



This booklet has been developed to give you more information on needle phobia and options to help improve your injection or infusion experience¹.

If you have any questions about needle phobia or treatment options, talk to your doctor or nurse.



WHAT IS NEEDLE PHOBIA?

Needle phobia is a fear of medical procedures that involve needles or injections.¹ It is quite common, affecting at least 1 in 10 people.¹ Needle phobia can lead to avoidance of injections.²

Many patients with needle phobia may have had a lot of blood tests or procedures as a child. A fear of needles and injections often, but not always, results from bad memories of needles earlier in life.¹





How do I know if I have needle phobia?

Needle phobia can be triggered by a number of factors, such as seeing or thinking about needles and injections.¹ One of the main features is the feeling of anxiety at the thought of injections.^{1,2} The signs and symptoms may also include increase in heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, trembling, and feeling panicky, sick, dizzy and light-headed.^{1,2} Some people faint.^{1,2}

Many people become frightened of their anxiety symptoms and worry that they are going to have a heart attack or faint. It is important that you understand what anxiety is and that you can, in fact, learn to control your anxiety symptoms once you understand what it is.³





What can I do about my needle phobia, if I have to receive injections or infusions for my treatments?

If you suffer from needle phobia, the concept of having to infuse or inject your treatment can be a daunting and overwhelming experience. However, there are a number of things that can help you with your needle phobia.


1. First, it is important that you talk to your doctor or nurse about your needle phobia so they understand how you feel.¹ This way they can get you the help you need.
2. There are a number of techniques available, such as relaxation exercises,² that may help to relieve the anxiety and stress of needles and infusions. Your doctor or nurse can provide you with information on these techniques and how to carry them out.

Try one or some of the following techniques for overcoming needle phobia

‘Facing your fear’ - An effective way to overcome a fear is to face it. This may seem like an impossible task at first but it can be made manageable by breaking things down into small steps and confronting your fear gradually, starting with the easiest step first. The steps to overcome your needle phobia may look something like this (from easiest to more difficult)³:

- Look at pictures of a needle or syringe.
- Hold a needle in your hand.
- Practice injecting water from a needle into an orange.
- Watch someone else having an injection.
- Have an injection.³

Deep breathing and other relaxation techniques can help to control your breathing and help you feel relaxed. It is important that you learn the relaxation techniques when you are calm. Do not try to learn relaxation techniques for the first time when you are having the injection done³:

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- a) Sit comfortably and place your hands on your stomach.
 - b) Let your stomach move out and fill with air as you breathe in deeply through your nose/mouth.
 - c) Hold that breath in for 3 or 4 seconds.
 - d) Breathe deeply out through nose/mouth while letting the stomach move back in.
 - e) Repeat steps b, c and d, trying to get a deep and gentle rhythm going.³

‘Imagery and distraction’ techniques - In situations where we feel anxious, it can be helpful to distract our attention away for a short time (usually during the most worrying bit). This can help us feel more in control and keep our anxiety levels manageable. Some examples of distraction techniques that you can try just before an injection are³:

- Focusing on an object and describing it in as much detail as possible.
- Activities that occupy the mind, such as counting back from 1000 in 7s, or thinking of animals beginning with each letter of the alphabet in turn.
- Thinking of a place you find relaxing and feel safe – what can you see, hear, smell and feel?³

‘Coping statements and praise’ - At times when we feel anxious, it can help to talk positively to ourselves, using encouraging statements. Below are some examples of statements that other people with a fear of needles have found helpful.³

Examples of coping statements³

- Just concentrate on trying to keep my breathing relaxed and steady.
- Relaxing my muscles will help this go better.
- I’m doing this for my family, my children and myself.

Examples of praising statements³

- I coped with that!
- I can be pleased with the progress I’m making.
- I’m getting better at managing this fear.

Are you ready to start?

Please keep in mind that whichever technique you decide to use for overcoming your fear of needles:

- You are not alone. Many people experience needle phobia, so do not feel ashamed about this.¹
- Tell your healthcare professional about your worries.
- Overcome your fear one step at a time.¹
- Practice is important. The more you practice the exercises in this leaflet, the more you will notice you feel less anxious and that your anxiety levels come down quicker each time.³

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.



References/Sources:

1. Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust. Overcoming your needle phobia (fear of needles). Available at: <https://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/resources/patient-information/all-patients/overcoming-your-fear-of-needles.pdf>. Accessed July 2019.
2. Diabetes.co.uk. Needle Phobia - Overcoming Fear of Needles. Available at: <https://www.diabetes.co.uk/emotions/needle-phobia.html>. Accessed July 2019.
3. NHS Fife UK, NHS Fife Psychology Department, Needle Phobia: Overcoming your fear of injections, July 2015, accessed online at: www.nhsfife.org May 2020.

