

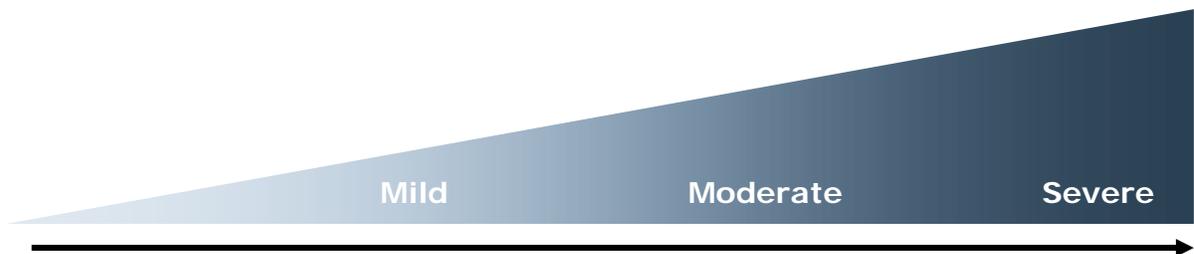
Are you afraid of needles?

Reading this information can help you learn about this common fear and how to cope or even overcome your fear.

Fear or phobia?

Many people are afraid of needles. Some people are afraid because they have had a painful or upsetting experience with needles in the past. For others, the fear is not related to experience and cannot be easily explained.

Each person's fear can be different. Reactions to needles can range from mild anxiety to panic. Talk to your doctor about your fears. He or she can help you decide if you have needle fear or phobia.



No fear

- No problem with blood tests.

Fear of needles

- Mild or moderate reaction to needles.
- Struggle with getting blood tests.

Needle phobia

- Avoid or refuse blood tests.
- Severe or uncontrollable fear even thinking about or seeing a needle.
- Body shows signs of fear - faster heart beat and breathing.

You can learn how to cope and even overcome a fear of needles.

Where can I get help?

If you are receiving care at McMaster Children's Hospital (MCH), a Child Life Specialist or Therapist can help you:

- target where your worries about needles started
- find ways to target specific worries
- get used to needles in a slow and controlled way – this process is called desensitization
- by supporting you during tests or procedures

You can also have desensitization sessions with your Child Life Specialist or Therapist to help you get used to seeing a needle. He or she can teach you relaxation and distraction techniques to practice before you get a needle. It can be helpful to talk with your Child Life Specialist or Therapist after getting a needle.

If you are not a patient at MCH, ask your family doctor about support and treatment options to manage your worry about needles and blood tests.

How can I help myself?

Target when the anxiety or worry about having the needle starts for you.

You don't have control over having the needle, but you do have control over what coping techniques you decide to use during the needle and how you prepare for it.

Practice the techniques you have learned from your Child Life Specialist or Therapist. These may include:

- deep breathing
- positive self-talk and coping statements
- guided imagery – imagining a favourite place or event
- safely practicing the steps leading up to a needle with other objects like a pen, bobby pin or cotton-tipped swab (Q-tip)
- distraction techniques

Or you may think of other ways to help yourself relax.

Find out what works best for you. Use the techniques you find most helpful.

You may find it helpful to rehearse in your mind what will happen when you go for a blood test. Your blood test may be done by a nurse or Medical Lab Assistant (MLA).

What to expect at a blood test

Checking in at the lab

- ✓ Take a number or tell someone that you have arrived.
- ✓ Sit in the waiting area until the MLA calls you.

Getting ready

- ✓ The MLA takes you to a private area where you can sit down. You may have someone stay with you; a parent or the Child Life Specialist or Therapist.
- ✓ Tell the MLA that you have a fear of needles and how to best help you. For example, by counting to 3 before the needle. Start the techniques you have practiced to help yourself stay calm and relaxed. Stay as still and relaxed as you can.
- ✓ The MLA puts a stretchy band around your upper arm. This squeezes your arm to make the needle easier and faster.
- ✓ The MLA wipes the skin on your arm. This feels cool and wet. You may find the wipe has a strong cleaning smell.

The needle

- ✓ Continue using the techniques you have practiced to help yourself stay calm and relaxed. Stay as still and relaxed as you can.
- ✓ Watch or look away, whatever you find helpful. Continue to breathe and relax your muscles.
- ✓ Expect to feel a slight pinch, but the more relaxed you are the more comfortable you will feel.

Afterwards

- ✓ The MLA tapes a cotton ball over your skin where the needle was or puts a bandage over it. You can take this off later.
- ✓ Feel free to take a moment to rest before getting up.

When you go for a blood test, ask someone to go with you for support. It is your job to tell the MLA and your support person about your fear of needles and how he or she can best help you cope through the needle.

Ask for help when you need it!
Plan a session with your Child Life Specialist or Therapist to practice coping strategies or desensitization.

Tips for parents and caregivers!

Here are some ways to help your child.

Make the fear normal

- Being afraid of needles is a real fear; needles are something that nobody likes to have done. By understanding this, you are best able to help your child recognize that his or her fear is real.
- Through 'normalization' your child may feel more supported and able to ask for help.

Reassure and support your child

- Overcoming a fear of needles is a gradual process. Encourage your child by saying positive things or providing some positive reinforcement each step of the way!
- Be available to go with your child to appointments when blood tests may be needed.
- Ask your child how he or she would like the needle to be done. Before the needle, decide which one person will be doing the talking to support your child, rather than having many voices speaking at once during the procedure. During the needle, help your child with the coping techniques that he or she finds most helpful, such as looking away, counting to 10 or holding hands.

Distract your child

- Ask the Child Life Specialist or therapist for an imagery script or talk about your child's favorite place.
- Bring an activity that your child can do in the waiting room or during the needle. Some ideas are: reading, playing hand-held video games, watching a movie on a portable DVD player, listening to music or playing a travel board game.
- Talk about topics that are neutral or relaxing such as friends, school, pets or home.
- Help your child do deep breathing.

If your child or teen receives care from a Pediatrician at McMaster Children's Hospital and has a fear of needles, please talk to your team about a referral to Child Life Services.