

Needle Fear:

When It Gets in the Way

Needle procedures are very common in health care, and can be used to diagnose, treat, prevent, and monitor different health conditions.

They include injections such as vaccines and some medications, and drawing blood.

Who experiences needle fear?

Both children and adults can experience some fear of needles.

33-63%
of children

14-38%
of adults



People with low to medium levels of needle fear benefit from typical comfort measures.

High Levels of Needle Fear

Occur in
5-10%
of adults &
children

Make
getting
needles very
difficult

Can
lead to
avoidance
of needles or
healthcare
visits

Need
special
treatment

How do we know if high levels of needle fear are present?

- **How afraid of needles is the individual** (not afraid, a little bit, medium amount, a lot, or the most afraid possible)?
- **Do you think this is higher than it should be?** (consider their age, other abilities and functioning)
- **Does the individual try really hard to avoid needles?** As a caregiver, do you try to avoid taking this individual for needles because of their reaction?

If an individual has a high level of needle fear, they should **have that fear treated before getting a vaccination in a routine clinic.**

Seek help for the needle fear. Ask your doctor or check local hospital, mental health services (psychologists, social workers) for healthcare providers who specialize in anxiety and exposure-based therapy.*

**see over for more information*

“Exposure-Based” Strategies

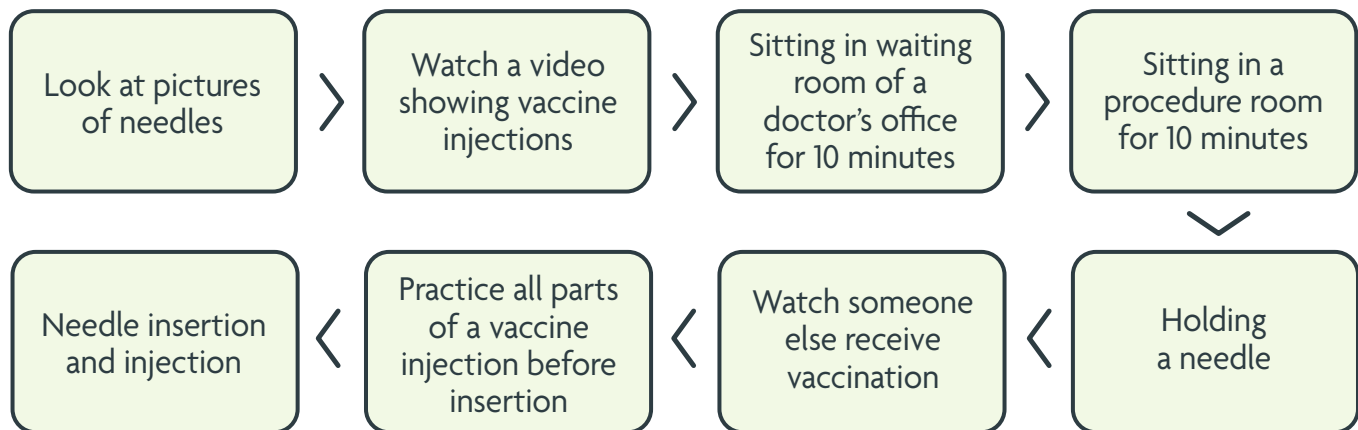
to Reduce Needle Fear

Exposure-based therapy is a type of treatment where a person is exposed to their needle fear in steps, in a slow and controlled manner.

This allows them to learn that whatever they are afraid of about the needle will not harm them or be as bad as they expect and that they can cope. A given step is repeated over and over again until the person reports little fear when practicing that step, then the next step is tried.

Below is an example of the steps (“hierarchy”) that might be taken with an adult with a fear of needles.

Note: Treatment of needle fear is usually supervised by a trained person, such as a psychologist.



Muscle Tension for people who get dizzy or faint during needles?

Feeling faint or dizzy during needles is more common for people with high levels of needle fear.

Fainting (also called vasovagal syncope) happens when someone's blood pressure and heart rate suddenly drop. Muscle tension keeps a person's blood pressure up so that the drop doesn't happen!

It consists of alternating between tensing and releasing muscle(s) in the body (e.g., legs, stomach).

If an individual gets dizzy or faints during needles, they should practice muscle tension.

Muscle tensions steps:

1. Sit in a chair.
2. Tense or squeeze the muscles in their legs and stomach.
3. Squeeze for about 10-15 seconds until their face feels flushed or warm.
4. Release the tension for 20-30 seconds.
5. Repeat steps 2, 3, and 4 until the needle is over, or until the feeling of faintness passes.