Autism Society

Fear of Needles

A Guide for People with Disabilities

Being Afraid of Needles is Normal.

Many people have a fear of needles. It is okay to be afraid. You can talk to a health professional or someone else you trust about how you feel. Health professionals help other people who are afraid of needles. They can help you too. There are also ways you can practicing being more comfortable around needles. Do not be afraid to ask your friends or family for extra help.

Preparing for the Appointment

There are many things you can do to prepare yourself and help you stay calm around needles. Get to your appointment early so that you have time to prepare and calm yourself.

- Talk to the person who is helping you schedule your appointment. Share your fears with them. This can be caregivers, doctors, nurses, or other health professionals.
- You may ask for numbing cream to help you feel less pain.
- Remember, needles can be scary but when they are used the right way they help keep us healthy.
- Some people want to see the needle before a shot and other people do not. Talk to your health professional about what helps you feel most comfortable.
- Practice what will happen the day of the appointment with a health professional or other trusted person. This helps you know what to expect.

Practice Deep Breathing

Sometimes when we are afraid, we can hold our breath or not breathe deeply. Learning how to breathe deeply can help you feel more relaxed. Here are some steps you can follow:

- Sit in a comfortable position
- Relax your body
- Close your eyes if you can and are comfortable
- If you can, put one hand on your stomach
- Take a long, deep breath in through your nose, and out through your mouth
- Try to breathe deep so you can feel your stomach expand
- Do this for a few minutes or until you feel calm
- Sometime touch from a family member of caregiver can help us when we feel scared. You can ask for them for a hug or to hold your hand.

If you cannot take deep breaths or feel your body expand, you can do other things to calm down like picturing a place where you feel happy or thinking of a happy memory. Consider using a device such as the "CalmiGo" to help control your breathing.

Use the Fear Ladder

The Fear Ladder is an exercise to help you with your fears. This can be done in the days or weeks before your appointment.

List your fears about needles from the most scary to the least scary. Here is an example:

- Having an injection in my arm
- Fainting
- Seeing a needle
- The medicine will make me sick
- Thinking about needles

- Start at the bottom of your list. Try to think of ways to overcome that fear. For example, if you have a fear of thinking about needles, practice thinking about needles in a safe space with someone you trust. After a few days, you may not feel as scared when you think about needles.
- When you overcome one fear, move up your list to the next.
- As you face these fears, use things like deep breathing or music to stay calm. It will take time to move up the fear ladder. Be patient with yourself and don't give up!

Key Reminders

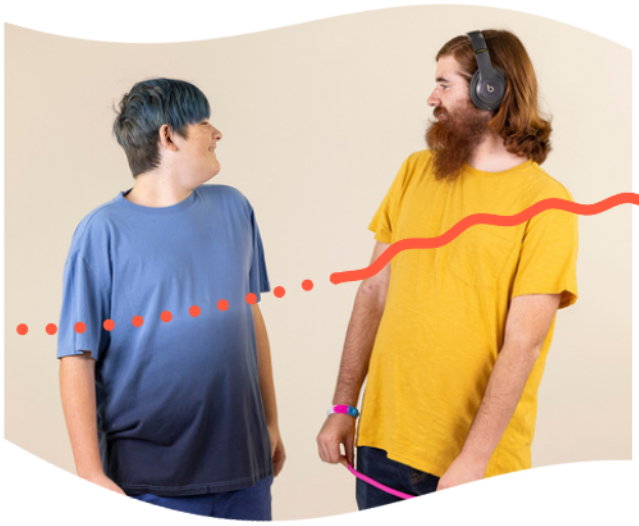
- It is okay to be scared of needles.
- Needles help give you medicine that keeps you healthy.
- Talk to a health professional or someone you trust for support.
- There are things you can do to prepare yourself for the appointment.

Resources

The Fear Ladder – The fear ladder is a tool that can be used to help overcome fears one step at a time. Examples and information about The Fear Ladder.

Exposure Therapy Information – Exposure therapy provides a safe way to work on addressing fears by using slow exposure.

CalmiGo Device – The CalmiGo device is a small, handheld, device that can help regulate breathing during moments of anxiety.



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Call us at 800.328.8476
Email us at info@autism-society.org
Learn more at AutismSociety.org

National Center on Disability in Public Health
Public health is for everyone.

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