

Non-Drug Pain Control for Kids

We believe that all patients deserve a good experience when they visit their provider’s office. The best way to do this is to avoid or decrease the amount of pain a patient feels during those visits. Children are exposed to many needle pokes during childhood. They may need vaccines, blood draws, or even IVs placed. Needle fears can last a lifetime if pain or anxiety is a major part of these visits.

How can a parent or support person help?

Not knowing what to do to help your child can be very stressful. Here are some ideas that we hope you may find helpful.

Be with Your Child

We suggest that you be in the room to hold and comfort your child during painful times. The stress that a child feels before and during a painful event will increase the amount of pain felt. Having a support person will decrease the amount of stress and pain.

Be Calm

A child can sense your anxious feelings. Your calm voice, words, and presence can help your child feel less anxious and fearful.

Choose Your Words Wisely

The words you use make an impact. Praise the child. Point out helpful behaviors before, during, and after any painful event. Let the child know when it is “all done.” Allow the child to express his/her feelings about what just happened. It is not helpful to tell the child you’re sorry, criticize the child or give complete control to the child. These may cause more distress and decrease the child’s level of cooperation.

Phrases that might help:

- “Tell me how it feels.”
- “Some children say they feel a warm feeling. How did it feel to you?”
- “Other kids tell me it feels like...”
- “When I count to three, blow the feeling away from your body.”
- “That was hard.”

Phrases to avoid:

- “This feels like a bee sting.”
- “The medicine will burn.”
- “Sorry.”
- “Be a big boy/girl!”
- “Don’t cry.”

Buzzy Bee

Buzzy Bee is a tool to reduce pain during pokes. The vibration and cold from Buzzy Bee work to block the pain signal from getting to the brain. The device works best when placed near the site of the needle stick though this is not always possible. It can also work well when placed at other sites, even on the other arm or leg. If a child is afraid of bees, Buzzy also comes in plain black or as a ladybug. Find out more at: www.buzzy4shots.com.

Help Your Child Get into a Helpful Position

Sitting on a Lap

- Helpful with infants and school-age kids
- Child sitting on adult’s lap
- Child’s legs can be tucked between adult’s legs
- Hugging and hand holding is very helpful
- Child can watch what is going on or focus on something else



Chest to Chest Hugging Hold

- Child can sit on lap or table
- Child can focus on something else
- View is blocked with the hold by a book or a toy



Sitting Beside Support Person

- Can sit in a chair or on bed
- Can choose to watch or focus on something else
- May use book or toy to block view



Lying Down

- Adult is behind or at side of the child
- Adult can hug or hold if needed
- Child can watch what is going on or focus on something else
- May have another staff gently hold knees.



Help Your Child Focus on Something Else

Changing your child's focus from a painful event to something else can be very helpful. Getting your child engaged in playing with a toy, searching for items in a picture, or reading a book are all great ideas. Bringing items from home that comfort your child can also be very helpful. A special blanket, pacifier, toy, or books are good ideas. Allow your child to be as involved in the process as they want to be. Some children may find it less stressful if they have the option of watching the needle and looking away when they want to.

Tips for 0-4 Months Old

- Swaddling—wrapping baby snugly in blanket with arms and legs
- Shushing—making calm soothing noises using “*shhh*” sounds
- Sucking--breastfeeding, bottle, pacifier, sugar water*
- Buzzy Bee

***Only use a few sugar water drops on the tongue or 1-2 dips of pacifier into the sugar water—too much can cause diarrhea.**

Tips for 4-12 Months Old

- Touching
- Stroking
- Patting
- Rocking
- Playing music
- Light up toys
- Buzzy Bee

Tips for 1-4 Years Old

- Puppet play
- Storytelling
- Interactive books – especially ones with flaps and buttons
- Deep breathing
- Blowing bubbles
- Music
- Singing
- Movies
- Light up toys

Tips for 4-6 Years Old

- Deep breathing
- Telling a story
- Puppet play
- Music
- Singing
- TV
- Talking about favorite places, TV shows, activities
- Interactive books such as I-Spy

Tips for 6-11 Years Old

- Music
- Deep breathing
- Counting
- Eye fixation (stare at an object without blinking)
- Humor – make the child laugh
- Music
- Video games
- Talking about favorite places

Tips for 12 Years Old

- Music
- Movies
- Video games
- Squeezing a stress ball
- Talking about things the child enjoys
- Ask the child

FAQs

“My 2 month old is coming in for his vaccines next week. I’m afraid of needles, how can I make this better for my child.”

At this age, vaccines are given in the thighs. Many babies like swaddling, and you can swaddle a baby on top and leave the legs exposed. A pacifier or breastfeeding or even sucking on your little finger can be very soothing to babies. After the injection, use a soothing voice (making a “shushing” sound) and sway back and forth will help to calm the baby. If you don’t know how to swaddle, ask someone on your child’s health care team to show you.

“I’ve decided to give my 1st grader a flu shot this year and he can’t get the mist because of his asthma. I’ve tried using distraction in the past with books and singing, but he’s already afraid before we walk through the door. What else can I do to help him through this?”

For this age, flu shots are most often given in the upper arm. Holding your child chest to chest in a hug can help comfort and help him stay still during the shot. Using cold packs before the shot or Buzzy Bee can distract the brain from the pain of injection. Buzzy and the ice packs don’t even need to be at the site of shot, they can be placed anywhere even on the opposite side of the body. Even though books didn’t work in the past, talking about something that has recently happened and engaging him in the story may be an option.

“My teenager doesn’t remember ever having her blood drawn and is nervous about having blood drawn next week. How can I help them be prepared the day of and prevent becoming an adult like me who is afraid of needles?”

Avoid talking about your own fears and instead talk honestly about the small amount of pain it will be, and how short the blood draw will last. Talk to your teen about bringing distraction items such as video games, music or a good book.

One medicine option that we suggest even for short procedures or pokes is L.M.X4. This is a topical over the counter ointment you can find at any pharmacy. It numbs the skin and is a very good tool to help manage pain. It is applied to the area of the skin where the needle will go in twenty to thirty minutes before the procedure.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 11/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#6835.