

Patient Information

Needle Phobia

Women's Services



Introduction

This leaflet explains about needle phobia and provides practical advice on how to overcome it. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to the midwife caring for you.

What is needle phobia?

Needle phobia is a fear of medical procedures that involve needles or injections. It is very common, affecting at least one in 10 people, and is nothing to be ashamed of.

Fortunately, simple exercises and practice can help to overcome it. Many women 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.

Signs and symptoms

For many women, the fear of needles is linked to fainting or feeling faint. When the fear is triggered (for example, by seeing blood or thinking about an injection), heart rate and blood pressure increase (as with other kinds of fears) but then rapidly drop. It is this fall in blood pressure that can cause fainting.

Other women do not feel faint or actually faint, but do feel panicky when their fear is triggered.

Many women do not confront their fear because they are embarrassed.

How we can support you

Staff looking after you will not be annoyed when you tell them about being scared of needles. They would like to know so that they can help to make it easier for you by:

- empowering you to access information and make choices around your care.
- encouraging you to attend your booking bloods appointment.

- offering you an appointment with the screening midwife to discuss your concerns, who will be able to take your bloods for you.
- offering you a cream to numb the area prior to procedure.
- making you an appointment with an anaesthetist if you need this support.
- referring you to your local wellbeing team for appropriate support to address your needle phobia.

How you can help yourself

There are a number of things you can do to help overcome your fear:

- Tell your community midwife or person who is doing the blood test about your worries. They may be able to answer any specific questions you have and help you cope with the procedure, for example, by chatting to distract you.
- Think about whether there has been anything which has helped you to cope with needles in the past. Can you use something like this to help you again?
- If your fear is linked to fainting, or feeling faint, you can learn an **applied tension** technique.
- If you feel panicky, such as your heart races, your chest feels tight and your stomach churns but you do not feel faint, you can learn a **breathing for relaxation** exercise.

Remember, the needle will not be unbearably painful. It will hurt a little but there are things you can do to help with feeling anxious, such as distracting your thoughts and using relaxation techniques.

You can read about the ‘applied tension’ technique and the ‘breathing for relaxation’ exercise on the next page.

Applied tension

Applied tension is a simple technique to increase blood pressure back to normal levels so that you don't faint. This is how you do it:

1. Sit down somewhere comfortable.
2. Tense the muscles in your arms, upper body and legs, and hold this tension for 10 to 15 seconds, or until you start to feel the warmth rising in your face.
3. Release the tension and go back to your normal sitting position.
4. After about 20 to 30 seconds, go through the tension procedure again until you feel the warmth in your face.
5. Repeat this sequence so that you have practised the tension five times.
6. If you can, practise this sequence three times every day for about a week, before moving on to facing your fear.
7. If you get headaches after doing this exercise, take care not to tense the muscles in your face and head. Also, be careful when tensing any part of your body where you have any health problems.

Breathing for relaxation

1. Sit in a comfortable position, with your back upright but not stiff.
2. Let your shoulders and jaw relax. Put one hand low down on your belly. Take a long, slow, deep, gentle breath in through your nose and out through your mouth.
3. Try to breathe right down into your belly, but don't force it. Just let your body breathe as deeply as is comfortable for you.
4. Do this for five breaths.
5. If possible, practise this exercise three times every day for a week before moving on to facing your fear.

Final steps - facing your fear

Once you have mastered the exercises on page 4, the next step is to start to face your fear of needles. It is important to take one small step at a time!

Overcoming your fear will take some time and practice, but it will make life less stressful and you will feel less anxious.

Key points

- Don't be ashamed of being scared of needles – you are not alone.
- Tell health professionals about your worries.
- Think about what helps you cope with this.
- Learn 'applied tension' technique if you faint or feel very faint, or 'breathing for relaxation' exercise if you feel panicky.
- Overcome your fear one step at a time.

Please turn over the page to read why blood tests are important in pregnancy and what the tests are for...

The importance of blood tests in pregnancy

Blood tests can help you make choices about your care or treatment during pregnancy or after your baby is born.

- **Booking appointment** - You will be offered booking bloods tests.
- **Between 16 and 20 weeks gestation** - Quadruple Test - Amniocentesis CVS NIPT.
- **28 weeks gestation** - Blood tests to check full blood count, blood group, and for diabetic monitoring.
- **Medical needs throughout pregnancy** - for example:
 - Thyroid function tests at 16 and 28 weeks gestation
 - Anaemia
 - Previous gestational diabetes:
 - home blood glucose monitoring
 - 16 and 28 weeks gestation blood glucose monitoring

Screening tests that are done by blood tests

Screening tests are offered during pregnancy to try to find any health conditions that you or your baby may have. They are not compulsory. However, if you decide not to be tested, you will be reoffered screening later in pregnancy, ideally by 20 weeks.

Screening tests offered include:

Infectious diseases screening - HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), Hepatitis B or Syphilis. These are strongly recommended to protect your health through early treatment and care. They greatly reduce any chance of passing an infection onto your baby, partner and family members.

Sickle cell and thalassaemia screening - to find out if you are a carrier of sickle cell, thalassaemia or other unusual haemoglobin gene and therefore likely to pass it on to your baby.

Iron deficiency screening - to find out if you have anaemia. Iron deficiency anaemia makes you tired and less able to cope with loss of blood when you give birth. You should be offered screening for iron deficiency anaemia at your booking appointment and at 28 weeks.

Blood group and rhesus - if you are rhesus negative, you may need extra care to reduce the risk of rhesus disease. This can happen if you are rhesus negative and pregnant. It involves your body developing antibodies that attack the baby's blood cells. This can lead to anaemia and jaundice in the baby. If you are rhesus negative, you may be offered injections during pregnancy to prevent you from producing these antibodies. This is safe for both mother and baby.

Down's syndrome, Edwards' syndrome and Patau's syndrome screening will be offered to assess your chances of having a baby with one of these conditions.

Combined screening test - called a combined test because it combines an ultrasound scan and a blood test to assess your chances of having a baby with one or all of the following conditions: Down's syndrome, Edwards' syndrome and Patau's syndrome.

Quadruple screening blood test - to assess your chances of having a baby with Down's syndrome.

Please use this space to write down any questions you may wish to ask:

Useful contact details

Antenatal Clinic, Lister Hospital	☎ 01438 314333 ext. 4070
Antenatal Appointments	☎ 01438 286031
Consultant Led Unit, Lister Hospital	☎ 01438 284124 (24 hours)
Midwifery Led Unit, Lister Hospital	☎ 01438 286197 (24 hours)
Birth Afterthoughts Appointments	☎ 01438 286079

Useful websites for more information

- **NHS website** - www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/
- **National Library of Medicine** - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4346072/>
- **Science Direct** - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0005796787901112?via%3Dihub>

Further reading

There are other maternity information leaflets you may wish to read. These are available on our East & North Herts NHS Trust website: www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk/patient-information/