

When Apprehension Interferes with Infusions

By Heather Bremner Claverie



THE TEARS. The jitters. The nausea. For individuals with an aversion to needles, these reactions can interfere with necessary medical procedures. This can be especially true for adults and children in the immune globulin (IG) community whose medical conditions require frequent infusions.

A Common Phobia

Fear of needles, or trypanophobia, isn't an odd paranoia. It starts from the time babies get their first shots and scream at the pain of the poke. Fast forward to older children who are now aware the implement the nurse is holding won't feel good. Then, those patients become adults who may prefer to look away rather than watch the nurse access a vein.

In 1994, needle phobia became a medically defined condition when the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* added blood-injection-injury phobia into its 4th edition.

An Unavoidable Act

People with needle phobia aren't aware of it until their first shot. And, since the etiology of needle phobia is an inherited vasovagal reflex (the sight of blood or certain stresses such as those triggered by a needle puncture), it can cause patients to learn to fear needles with each successive shot.

Yet, unlike some phobias that can be alleviated by avoiding the act or object, needles are a medical necessity. And, for individuals who rely on infusions every three or four weeks, it's not the solution to the problem. In addition, some fear or anxiety around infusions may not be related to needles. For individuals who don't have easily accessible veins and must

deal with repeated pokes, infusions may be particularly painful and uncomfortable.

Out of Sight; Not Out of Mind

Not thinking about an upcoming infusion is one possible coping method, but it doesn't serve patients well. Mental issues are only a part of the picture. When patients become nervous, their blood vessels dilate and their hearts race. This temporary hypertension causes blood to rush to the heart and chest, in turn making the veins difficult to access. That's why it's critical that individuals who suffer from infusion anxiety but rely on it for their health take steps to cope with the issue.

Developing trust with the nurse is one essential component. Letting healthcare professionals know they're dealing with infusion anxiety gives the nurse a chance to address the issue and prepare their patient. Warming up the infusion sites before the procedure with a bath or heating pads is a simple way to alleviate pain. Also, applying a topical anesthetic that contains lidocaine and prilocaine beforehand will numb the infusion site. Wearing loose, comfortable clothing and drinking plenty of water throughout the day will help, too.

For younger patients, infusions can be a huge source of anxiety. The first step is to find an experienced pediatric nurse who specializes in infusions. Swaddling patients between the ages of 1 year to 2 years has been shown to help since it gives them a sense of security and safety. Older children need to be told about each step of the process. Make sure the nurse gives them details about the procedure before and during, and doesn't make the mistake of saying it won't hurt.

Some parents have discovered that the distractions provided by virtual reality glasses are a huge asset during infusions. Anything that lets the patient relax such as calming music or meditation is recommended.

After applying all these remedies, an adage comes into play: It's difficult to be anxious in the face of humor, so adding humor into pre-infusion rituals may serve as the best medicine. ■

HEATHER BREMNER CLAVERIE is a contributing writer for *IG Living* magazine.

Step Into an Alternate Reality



Google Daydream View gives patients the power to fly off to other lands and immerse themselves in another world. Simply slip on the comfortable headset and embark on adventures during an infusion session. Patients can stream thousands of movies and apps and share their experiences with friends and family. \$59.95;

amazon.com

Turn Up the Heat



Heating up infusion sites in advance can alleviate some of the pain associated with the procedure since it helps increase blood flow to those areas. The generous size of the Sunbeam Heating Pad for Pain Relief and its 9-foot-long chord gives patients the ability to relax while effectively warming up a 12-by-24-inch area. Three different settings let patients decide the intensity of the temperature, and a removable cover makes it easy to clean. \$19.99;

sunbeam.com

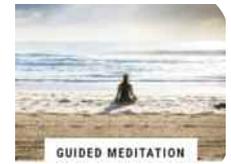


Tune It Out

Noise-canceling, wireless headphones are a nice accessory for infusion visits. These comfortable headphones will not only block out surrounding noise, but will give the patient the ability to listen to a steady stream of music, podcast or audiobook. They can even listen to guided meditations during procedures to calm them into a meditative state.

\$349.95; bose.com

Shopping Guide to Anxiety Products



Practice Mindfulness

Numerous studies have shown simple meditation is an effective tool to combat anxiety symptoms. But calming an active mind isn't as simple as it appears. Guided meditations are a great way to start and can help calm the nerves before or during infusion procedures. Mindful is a great resource for a variety of guided meditations that can help individuals navigate difficult emotions and improve sleep and destress. free;

www.mindful.org/mindful-top-10-guided-meditations-of-2018

Stress Less with Natural Solutions



Herbs have been used for thousands of years to treat a wide variety of ailments, from colds to angst. Vetiver, a plant known as the “oil of tranquility,” can be dropped on the wrist, chest or neck or into bath water. Lavender is another plant well-known for its ability to alleviate anxiety, sleep disturbance and stress. Ingest it via capsules, inhale it or apply it topically. For kids, the Aura Cacia Kids Foam Bath smells good and calms high-strung youngsters. \$3.29-\$22.99;

[Sprouts Farmers Market and Target, or auracacia.com](http://SproutsFarmersMarketandTarget.com)

Get Comfortably Numb

A topical anesthesia such as EMLA cream can help ease some of the anxiety about pain. This U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved product uses a combination of 2.5 percent lidocaine and 2.5 percent prilocaine, two substances that enter through the skin and block pain receptors in nerve endings. Adults and children can use this cream, but dosage guidelines should be discussed with their physician.



Available by prescription only