Dear Alice,

I am really afraid of shots. What should I do? I feel really embarrassed asking this. HELP!

Answer

Dear Reader,

Assuming that you're talking about medically related injections, rather than "shots" of alcohol, here's some sugar that might help the medicine go down. Shots, or inoculations, are generally a safe and effective way of preventing diseases and other conditions, but lots of people, both children and adults, dread getting them. For most folks, the embarrassment of making a fuss (e.g., kicking and screaming, or making nurses or doctors chase you around the exam room) eventually outweighs the fear, and they learn to live with (but not like!) the occasional inoculation. By looking, in advance, for other ways to take the sting out of shots, you are showing maturity and courage.

To reduce trypanophobia (fear of injections), some doctors' offices use cooling sprays or anesthetic creams that will numb the skin before the shot. These products can make vaccinations virtually pain-free. Check with the providers where you get your inoculations to see if this is an option. You can also let your health care provider know about your fear. Not only is your health care provider probably familiar with your feelings; s/he may have some tricks up her/his sleeve that will make rolling yours up easier.

In the meantime, you might want to practice some do-it-yourself techniques. Here are some ideas for making it easier:

- Tensing yourself and your muscles before an inoculation can make the pain worse. Instead, practice taking deep, controlled breaths. When it comes time for the actual needle, blow out forcefully through your mouth (as though you were blowing out candles on a birthday cake). This will help keep you from tensing up. Never looking at the needle, and not watching when it enters the skin, may help, too.
- Learn about how and why immunizations work and some of the diseases that they prevent. Understanding that enduring a few minutes of discomfort will save you from weeks or years of illness might make the "pinch" seem more bearable. Learning when you need to get shots, and choosing to get one at your preferred time of day, which family member or friend you'd like to go with you, and even which arm to get it, will allow you to feel a bit more in control.
• Bring along a favorite book, listen to some tunes, or play a game on your phone while you're in the waiting room. Spend the time before the vaccination enjoying your book, music, or game instead of worrying about the you-know-what.
• Plan a special treat to reward yourself for getting through the experience: dinner out with friends, a massage, the movies, or a special event like a concert or show. Having a reward to look forward to can keep you focused on something positive rather than on your fear.

Your fear is a common one that needn't cause you embarrassment. By talking about your fear and taking some steps to relax, you may find you experience less anxiety when the time comes to get a shot. Good luck!

Alice!
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