

## Afraid of shots <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

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

### Answer

Dear Reader,

Kudos to you for asking! It can be really tough to ask about your fears and find ways to overcome them. 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 can refer to any number of injections, be it vaccines, insulin injections, various medications, injectable birth control, or fertility treatments among others. Despite their common use in the medical field, lots of people, both children and adults, dread getting them, so there's no need to feel embarrassed about being afraid of them. However, there are some techniques to help you overcome this fear to ensure you get the medical care you need.

When going to get your shot, it can be helpful to let your health care provider know about your fear. You're likely not the first patient that has expressed concerns regarding shots, and they probably have some techniques of their own to make you feel more at ease. Additionally, you can ask if they use any cooling or anesthetic sprays to numb the skin before the shot. This can limit some of the pain or discomfort from the injection. In the meantime, you might want to practice some do-it-yourself techniques. Some suggestions for making it easier include:

- Tensing yourself and your muscles before an injection 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. Keeping your eyes off the needle and not watching when it actually enters the skin may help, too.
- Ask your health care provider about the "cough" technique. Research shows that a cough before and once during the injection helps some feel less pain.
- Bring along a favorite book, listen to some tunes, or play a game on your phone while you're in the waiting room. This will help you focus your attention on something other than the shot while waiting.

- Bring a buddy for support. Have someone you trust come with you to provide reassuring words, hold your hand, or just be there while you get the shot.
- Plan a special treat to reward yourself for getting through the experience: dinner out with friends, a massage, the movies, or a special event such as a concert or show. Having a reward to look forward to can keep you focused on a positive rather than on your fear.

All this being said, for some people, fear of needles may be more severe, such as a needle phobia. If this is the case for you, meeting with a mental health professional may be beneficial. For those with more extreme needle phobias, some therapeutic treatments have been found to be helpful and reduce the feelings of fear, such as medications and cognitive-based therapy.

Rest assured, many people share your fear of shots. 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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