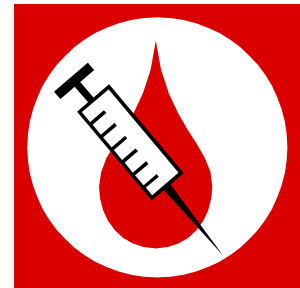# Dealing With Scary or Stressful Medical Procedures (scans, needles etc…)

Do you fear certain medical examinations?

Fearing needles is common, but you don't have to let it stop you from getting good medical care.

Here are some steps that you can do straight away to make it easier.

"NO MATTER HOW STRONG THE FEAR, THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO TO MAKE IT EASIER."

1. **ASK FOR INFORMATION**
   It can be very helpful to know (a) what is going to happen and (b) what it's going to feel like. It only takes a minute and your doctor would want you to ask. If you have had bad experiences before, let your doctor or nurse know.

   You could try questions like: "What exactly is going to happen?"
   "What will you do and how will it feel?"
   "Will it hurt much afterwards?"
   "If I start to feel faint, what should I do?"

2. **MOTIVATE YOURSELF**
   Remind yourself why it IS worthwhile going through stressful procedures. For instance, try saying something relevant to your situation, like:

   "I *need* this test to know how worried I have to be", or

   "Getting this over and done with today, means I don't have to think about it. I'll feel great when it's over", or

   "I really want to be fixed for me and my family – a bit of pain is worth it".

3. **REASSURE YOURSELF**
   Try saying things like:

   "Hundreds of people go through this every day – I guess I'll cope too."

   "It can't be too bad – after all, I'm in good hands and my doctor wouldn't do anything unbearable."

   "If I use some coping strategies I bet it will be over quicker than I realise."

4. **BREATHING AND RELAXATION**
   Slow, relaxed breathing is the key to relaxing your body. And relaxing your body helps in a few ways. Read over for more information on relaxing during stressful procedures.

RELAXATION

- Relaxed muscles reduce pain.

- Being relaxed means that it is easier to use other strategies like "self-reassurance" and "distraction".

- It just makes us feel a bit better.

- It shows us that we can control our own body even under stress, so it gives us a sense of control, safety and achievement.

Here's how to do it:

A) Focus your attention on your breathing.

B) Slowly take some air down into the bottom of your lungs – moving your tummy out as you breathe in.

C) Slowly let the air out - count to 4 slowly as you breathe out.

D) Let your shoulders and arms go **floppy** and **heavy** as you breathe out.

E) Try focusing on relaxing *other* body parts as you breathe out (eg. your feet if there is a needle in your arm).

5. **DISTRACTION**

During a painful or distressing procedure, one of the best things to do is keep your mind busy. Ask someone to talk to you or hold your hand. If you are on your own, then try one of these ideas:

a) Focus all your attention on the **toes** in one foot. Try moving the big toe. Can you move it without moving other toes? What about your little toe, can you move that?

b) Shut your eyes for a bit and **notice every sound** in your environment.

c) **Count backwards** from 100 in 3's – 100, 97, 94, and so on.

d) **Visual Imagery**. Picture the front of your home. Try to recall – in your "mind's eye" – all the details you can notice: the entrance, any trees or plants, what the building is made of, what colours are on the building, what building is next door, what the street looks like. Every time you get distracted, bring your attention back to this mental picture.

BUT WHAT IF I DO REALLY FAINT?
If you have fainted before when exposed to needles or blood, then tell your doctor or the nurse in the surgery – they will understand and help you. The best thing to do is (1) lie down before the procedure starts, then (2) occasionally tense your shoulders, chest and arm muscles by clenching and unclenching those muscles – it helps maintain your blood pressure.
You can still use distraction, as described above. Drink fluids afterwards.