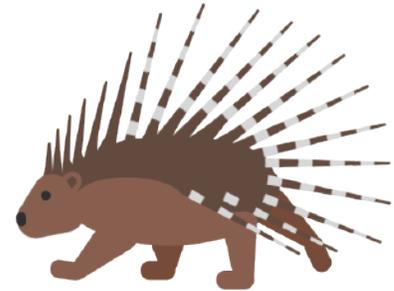


Overcoming Needle Fear

Welcome! In this course, you will learn ways to cope with needle fear. Your fears are valid, but you *can* overcome them.

There are Three Levels of Needle Fear:

1. **Dislike.** You may not like needles—but can look away during placement and get through it.
2. **Discomfort.** You may be upset by how needles feel, more than you might have expected.
3. **Phobia.** Your fear is so intense it makes your heart race and speeds up your breathing.



Your Vascular Access: A way to reach your blood for hemodialysis (HD). It may be made with just your own blood vessels or man-made vessels. Needles are used to run your blood through a filter called a dialyzer. Then, the clean blood is returned to your body.

There are Ways to Help Needle Discomfort.

1. Get Comfortable Before HD:

- Relax your arm.
- Use a pillow under your arm for support.
- You may find a countdown helpful, or you may want it over with as fast as possible.
- Try a numbing cream or spray.
- Once you learn what works for you, tell your nurse.

Reducing Pain Can Lower Anxiety—and Fear!

Ask your doctor if you can try EMLA® cream. Follow these steps:

1. Start 2 hours before HD.
2. Wash your access.
3. Apply 1/8" thick dime-sized blob to each site.
4. Cover with plastic wrap.
5. Remove plastic and wash arm again.
6. Disinfect per policy.
7. Place the needles for HD (cannulate).



2. Distract Yourself:

- Sniff lavender oil on a cotton ball.
- Listen to music you like.
- Try a meditation app.
- Use a stress ball or squeeze toy.
- Talk about something you enjoy—like a pet or favorite tv show.



3. Take Control: You have done hard things before and you CAN do this too. When you learn about your treatment, you will be better prepared for what comes your way. This is a BIG challenge, but you can do it!

Learn to Self-cannulate: You are the only person on earth who can feel both ends of a needle. This makes you the most likely one to get them in right. And, our brains can only do one thing at a time. When you focus on getting a needle in it hurts much less. People who self-cannulate often say they will never let staff do it again!

4. Practice with a Blunt Needle: Ask your nurse if you can take home a blunt needle. You can look at it, handle it, tap the point against your skin, and open and close the clamp. You may find this helps you get used to the needles, and makes them less scary.

Reframe the Big Picture

Get to know your access. Your nurse will show you how to look, listen, and feel your access each day to keep it healthy. Gaining comfort with your access is a step toward being less afraid of using it. Your access belongs to you. It is a part of your body and is your lifeline. Take good care of it!

Every Access is a Lifeline: You may notice other patients' arms and worry "will my arm look like that?" Remember—no one is perfect. Whatever your access looks like—it deserves respect. If you don't like to be asked:

- Cover your access stretchy, non-constricting sleeve.
- Make up a story, like "a shark bit me".
- Use questions as an opening to teach others about kidney disease.



Needle Phobia is Very Common: As many as 1 in 5 people fear needles. That number is much higher for people on dialysis. Have you noticed any of these symptoms?

- Dreading treatments
- Shaking
- Rapid breathing
- Crying
- Drop in blood pressure

If you have fainted in the past, try putting your feet up before cannulation. Keeping your feet above your heart can be a big help!

If your fear of needles is making your life worse—talk to your team about resources like therapy. Connect with others who have been where you are—and made it through. They may have tips you have not tried. And it can help to know you are not alone. You can feel better.

Don't Let Needle Fear Control Your Life! Distract yourself when they are placed. Give yourself grace to get used to your new normal. Celebrate the little victories and focus on how far you've come. You've got this.