

# Stopping Yourself from Fainting When You Get a Shot or Give Blood

## **Objective**

To learn the Applied Tension technique and use it when you are getting an injection or giving blood to avoid fainting.

## **You Should Know**

Nobody really likes getting an injection or giving blood. Most people feel a little nervous, even queasy, before going to an appointment when they expect these medical procedures to occur. But some people have a reaction that goes well beyond being nervous. If you start to sweat, hyperventilate, feel dizzy, or even faint every time you even think about needles, then you may be one of tens of thousands of people (about 4% of the population) who suffer from “blood/injection/injury phobia.”

Fainting is caused by a sudden drop in your heart rate or blood pressure. Most of the time when you are anxious or fearful, your heart rate and blood pressure actually go up. This is why it is so rare to faint when you are feeling anxious. However, some people with a fear of blood or needles experience an initial increase and then a sudden drop in their blood pressure, which can result in fainting. For many people, the fear of fainting takes the place of the fear of needles and blood. In the worst case scenario, people avoid getting necessary medical procedures because they fear needles and the sight of blood.

If you do have a fear of fainting, you should know that injuries caused by fainting are actually pretty rare. However, since falling from a standing position without support can be harmful, it is important to tell any medical professional you are seeing that this is a concern of yours, particularly if you have fainted before.

Fortunately, if you find yourself anxious and fearful that you will pass out when you get an injection or give blood, there is something you can do about it. A technique developed by researchers Michael Kozak and George Montgomery called Applied Tension can help you avoid fainting. This worksheet shows you how to master the Applied Tension technique, which is easy to learn, although it takes a little practice.

You'll need to practice the exercises for at least a week prior to getting an injection or giving blood. It involves just tensing your legs, torso, and arms repeatedly for 20 to 30 seconds at a time. You know you are doing it correctly because your face will feel a little flushed after your practice.

Here is what to do.

Sit in a comfortable chair and tense the muscles in your arms, legs, and trunk for about 10 to 15 seconds. You should feel that your face is getting warm as you tense up. Then relax your body for 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat this four or five times.

Note that the goal is not to become completely relaxed, as this will cause your blood pressure to drop. Rather, the goal is to let your body return to a normal state (not overly tense or completely relaxed).

Once you have practiced the Applied Tension technique, it will be easy to do if you find yourself feeling light-headed at the doctor's office. You can do the technique while the procedure is going on, but don't tense the arm that is receiving the needle since this will make it more painful. Instead, try to relax the arm getting the needle while tensing other parts of your body.

Use the worksheet on the next page to record practicing the technique several times a day for at least a week.

## Practicing the Applied Tension Technique

Directions: Practice the Applied Tension technique for at least a week, four or five times a day, before visiting the doctor. This practice is important because you want to feel comfortable with the technique before having to use it. Keeping track of your practice will help ensure that you are well prepared for your medical visit.

Think about the last time you had a problem getting an injection or giving blood each time you practice this technique. Rate your anxiety on a 1-to-10 scale, with 1 = no anxiety or fear and 10 = you are so fearful and anxious that you feel faint. Note: If you are at all concerned that you actually might faint practicing this technique, ask someone to stand near you during your practice.

Date of scheduled medical visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Day	Time	Number of Times You Tensed Up	Rate Your Fear/Anxiety Level

**Think About It**

Is there anything that might prevent you from practicing the Applied Tension technique?

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Are there other situations where you are afraid that you might faint and this technique would be useful?

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Do you think that mastering this technique can help you in any specific way with your fears or anxiety?

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How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

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