

A GUIDE TO MINIMISING TRAUMA IN PAEDIATRIC BLOOD COLLECTION



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Blood collection can be a stressful experience for children and their parents. This fact sheet provides practical tips for both parents and healthcare professionals to minimise the distress associated with blood tests in children.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Prepare your child

Being honest with your child is important and can help prepare your child to have their blood taken.

- Explain the procedure and why they need it in age-appropriate terms
- Be honest in answering any questions they have
- If asked if it will hurt, explain that some children say it hurts a bit, but others are not bothered
- Describe sensations they might feel, like a 'tight squeeze' for the tourniquet, or a 'small sting' when the needle is inserted
- Let them know if they have to wait until after the blood test before they can eat – you will need to check with your doctor
- Practice deep breathing exercises together
- Allow your child some control by asking if they want to watch or look away

Create a positive environment

Schedule the appointment for when your child is less likely to be hungry or tired, if possible.

- Bring a favourite toy or book for distraction
- Plan a fun activity or reward for after the procedure
- Check with your doctor if pain relief options (such as paracetamol, ibuprofen or sedation) are appropriate
- If your child is prone to fainting, let the health practitioner know so they can lay them down while they collect blood
- If your child is anxious, let the practitioner know so they can provide reassurance.

MORE TIPS FOR PARENTS

During the procedure

Provide support to help your child feel as confident and relaxed as possible.

- Hold your child in a comfort position if they are small
- Provide physical comfort through hand-holding or gentle touch
- Use distraction techniques like singing, counting, storytelling, or talking about the reward you have planned after the procedure
- If old enough, encourage your child to use deep breathing techniques
- Use a calm voice when talking to them
- In the case of an infant, try feeding them during the procedure to distract them

After the blood collection

- Praise your child for their bravery and their resilience
- Follow through with the planned reward or activity
- Discuss the experience positively to help prepare for future procedures

OTHER HELPFUL TIPS FOR PARENTS

During the procedure

1. Ask questions

Ask your healthcare provider about the necessity of each test and if there are alternative options.

2. Keep records

Keep a record of your child's recent blood tests to avoid unnecessary tests.

3. Clarify if fasting is required

Many blood tests for pituitary issues are done while fasting (before breakfast) and before morning medications, so ask your doctor if this is the case.

4. Combined blood tests

If multiple tests are needed, ask if they can be combined into a single blood collection.

5. Plan ahead

For ongoing conditions, discuss with your doctor the optimal frequency for blood tests.



TIPS FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Create a child-friendly environment

- Use colourful, child-friendly decor in the blood collection area
- Have toys, books, or electronic devices on hand to help distract children who may be anxious
- Consider using child-sized equipment such as a chair, when possible
- Talk to the child
- Introduce yourself and explain what you do
- Build rapport and trust by asking them about their day, pets, or favourite TV show
- Use age-appropriate language to describe the procedure in advance
- Tell them exactly what will happen, where the needle will be inserted, and what they might feel
- Reassure them that the procedure is very safe and lots of other children have had blood tests
- Offer choices to give the child a sense of control, such as which arm to use or whether to count down

Minimise pain and anxiety

- Use topical anaesthetics if appropriate
- Consider using devices like Buzzy®, which uses vibration and cold to reduce pain
- Employ distraction techniques appropriate for the child's age
- Use the smallest gauge needle appropriate for the test
- Consider other collection methods like finger or heel pricks when suitable
- Limit the number of attempts and know when to call for assistance

Special considerations for neonates and infants

Blood sampling in neonates and infants requires extra care. Aim to:

- Keep the baby warm to improve blood flow
- Use appropriate-sized equipment
- Consider heel pricks instead of venipuncture when suitable

IMPORTANT

It's important for parents and healthcare professionals to work together to minimise the stress and discomfort associated with blood collection in children. The above recommendations are a guide only. Each child is unique, and approaches may need to be tailored to individual circumstances.

MORE INFORMATION

The Australian Pituitary Foundation provides social support for patients and carers, and has published a range of patient resources on pituitary conditions and treatments.

For more information, please visit our website: www.pituitary.asn.au

Email: support@pituitary.asn.au

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REFERENCES

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