

WHAT IS PROCEDURAL ANXIETY?

Fear, worry, stress, and anxiety about medical procedures is common.

[Procedural anxiety](#) is fear about a medical procedure that:

- Interferes with your ability to start or complete a procedure
- Leads you to avoid the procedure altogether
- Prevents you from coping effectively before, during or after the procedure

The body is *supposed* to “signal” to us when something is new, unexpected, potentially harmful, or uncomfortable to help keep us safe and healthy. Sometimes the signal is too strong, which can lead to anxiety growing and getting out of control. These feelings can begin even days before the procedure and last after it. The good news is that there is a lot we can do to prevent or manage procedural anxiety.

Depending on age and development, symptoms of procedural anxiety can include:

- Being irritable, angry, or aggressive
- Sweating, shaking or trembling
- Crying or screaming
- Refusing to cooperate, hiding, trying to leave the room, or avoiding medical visits where procedures are expected
- Having difficulty breathing or a racing heartbeat
- Being unable to think clearly or feeling detached from reality

WHAT CAN WE DO TO MANAGE ANXIETY ABOUT PROCEDURES?

Learn more about the procedure

- Feel more in control by learning who will do the procedure, where it will be, why you need it, and what you should feel like afterward.
- Help kids prepare. Some children benefit from not knowing about a procedure until right before, and some need time to ask questions and create a plan to feel ready. Many hospitals have child life specialists whose job is to help children learn about procedures and develop coping skills through play.
- Ask about choices you can make like watching or not watching the procedure, picking where on your body to get a shot, or to have the procedure at the beginning or the end of a clinic visit.

Find ways to help lower stress

- Get a full night’s sleep.
- Think of ways to have fun and relax on your way into clinic.
- Bring an object that comforts you from home like a blanket or photo.
- Write down feelings to help describe the experience to others.
- Develop and share a “comfort plan” that lists what you need to help you relax and cope.

Use proven strategies

- Identify an activity or object to look forward to after the procedure is finished.
- Bring a friend or loved one for support.
- Numb skin at least 60 minutes ahead of time to help make needle sticks less painful.
- Use a device to reduce the sensation of pain for needle sticks (ask your team for suggestions).
- Use distraction.
- Use positive words, like giving praise specifically for using coping skills and cooperating.

DISTRACTIONS TO TRY

- Listening to music
- Playing video games
- Watching funny videos



For infants and young children:

- Breastfeed infants, which helps comfort, distract, and decrease pain.
- Dip an infant's pacifier in sugar water, which works as a pain reliever.
- Show your child how to be calm by using a quiet voice, smiling, and breathing slowly and deeply.
- Ask your team to suggest comfort positions.

Get support

- Talk to others, such as your care team, family, friends, or therapist about how you feel.
- Teens and adults can benefit from support from others who have had similar experiences through programs like [CF Peer Connect](#).

Get help from mental health professionals

- A mental health professional can help you learn and practice techniques to manage difficult thoughts or strong stress reactions such as:
 - Deep breathing
 - Muscle relaxation
 - Guided imagery
 - Mindfulness
 - Exposure therapy
 - Positive self-talk (“*I have done this before and it went fine*”)
- A mental health professional—and your CF team—can discuss the pros and cons of medications to help manage pain or anxiety.

DEEP BREATHING: RELAX THE BODY AND MIND



- Breathe in deeply through your nose while counting to four



- Hold the breath for a second



- Breathe out slowly through your mouth while counting to four
- Try to expand your belly bigger while you breathe in and make it smaller when you breathe out

GUIDED IMAGERY TO RELAX BODY AND MIND

- Close your eyes
- Imagine being in a fun and relaxing place
- Imagine what you see, hear, and can feel



TO LEARN MORE

View the CF Foundation and ECFS Guidelines at cff.org/Care-Guidelines/Depression-Anxiety

View the CF Foundation's website on emotional wellness at cff.org/Living-with-CF/Emotional-Wellness

For questions, call **1-800-FIGHT-CF** (800-344-4823) or email info@cff.org.

References

1. Bartley B, Dhingra LK, Hussain S, Quittner AL, Dellon EP, Georgiopoulos AM. How can my pain be managed? In: *Facing Cystic Fibrosis: A Guide for Patients and their Families*. Sher Y, Georgiopoulos AM, Stern TA (eds.) Boston: Massachusetts General Hospital Psychiatry Academy, 2020.
2. Friedrichsdorf SJ, Eull D, Weidner C, Postier A. A hospital-wide initiative to eliminate or reduce needle pain in children using lean methodology. *Pain Rep.* 2018 Sep 11;3(Suppl 1):e671. eCollection 2018 Sep.

