

Helping Your Child Through an IV or Blood Test

At MassGeneral Hospital *for Children*, we are committed to making your child's IV or blood test as comfortable as possible. Your role is very important, as children find it comforting when their parents are involved. This guide will give you some ideas about how you can best help your child.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY CHILD?

Tell your child what is going to happen and encourage your child to ask questions. You know your child best, and you know how much information your child can take in at a time.

WHAT CAN I DO FOR MY INFANT DURING THE PROCEDURE?

It is very important to support your infant during the actual procedure. We recommend you:

- Hold your baby when possible. Soothing touch, such as rubbing your infant's head or back, also helps
- Swaddle your infant snugly in a blanket so his/her entire body is covered. This helps your infant feel a sense of control
- Breastfeed your infant. It is a familiar source of comfort and helps to distract your baby
- Give specially prepared sucrose (Sweet Ease). Ask the staff if you are interested in this
- Distract your infant. Talk and smile with younger infants and play with older infants



HOW TO ANSWER YOUR CHILD'S QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TEST OR PROCEDURE

Why do I need this done?

The blood test will give the doctor information to help take care of you. Having an IV placed helps to give you important liquid or medicine that you can't swallow.

What will happen to me?

- They will clean the area where you need the blood test or IV. This will feel cool and may have a funny smell
- A big rubber band called a tourniquet will be wrapped around your arm, giving your arm a tight hug

What should I do during the test?

Your job is to hold still. It is OK to cry, but holding still will make the test go more quickly.

- They will tap on your arm to find veins. Veins are the small blue lines under your skin. They are the roads our blood uses to travel through the body
- An IV is like a small straw that goes in your vein. The needle helps get the straw in, and will come out when the straw is in the vein. (Be honest about the needle, but let your child know the needle will not be in for too long.)

WHAT CAN I DO FOR MY CHILD DURING THE PROCEDURE?

Distraction

Distraction is the best way to calm your child. Pick something that will hold your child's attention. Examples are music, reading, blowing bubbles, talking (not about the hospital) or counting.

Imagery

Have your child think about a happy time. Talk about a memory, like a fun vacation, going down a roller coaster or hitting a home run. You can help them get into the details—what were the sounds and smells around them, who else was there and what it would be like if they did it again.

Holding

Many children like their parents to hold them during the procedure. If your child is young, he or she may want to sit on your lap. An older child may prefer you to hold their hand or rub their back.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I WILL NOT BE WITH MY CHILD DURING A PROCEDURE?

Some parents prefer not to be with their child during a needle stick. There are also times when a child is hospitalized, and parents are unable to make arrangements to be with their child. The staff will work with you to plan the best ways to help your child when you are not able to be there.

NUMBING MEDICINE

There are local anesthetics or “numbing” medicines, which may make the “poke” hurt less. Some work quickly, others take a half hour to an hour to work. Many children like to use numbing medicine, but some children do not want to wait. Talk with your provider about the use of local anesthetics for your child. Make sure your child knows that they will feel some pressure during the procedure, even with the medicine.

PRAISE AND REWARDS

Praising your child right after the procedure is very important. If your child feels good about how it went, they are more likely to do well with other medical tests they may have. Praise is important. Let your child know they did well. Rewards like stickers or a special treat lets your child know they have done a good job.

WORKING WITH A CHILD LIFE SPECIALIST

A child life specialist is trained in preparing and supporting children and parents through medical tests. They can answer any questions that you have about how to best help your child. Tell your child's doctor or nurse if you would like to meet with a child life specialist.

LET US KNOW . . .

It is very helpful for us to know about your child's past experiences with blood tests and IV insertions. If these procedures have gone well in the past, let us know what worked. If your child has had difficulty tolerating these procedures, we will work with you and your child to improve the experience. Let us know if there have been any problems finding your child's veins in the past. Child life specialists are especially helpful for children who need additional preparation, help and support.

Child Life Services

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If you have any questions, please contact
Child Life Services at

617-724-5727