

# Blood Tests

Helpful tips for parents by parents

## Anxiety

Try to keep calm yourself with slow breathing as your child will pick up on any anxiety you show. Get EMLA or Ametop cream prescribed by the GP to put on at home yourself so that you minimise the wait time at the hospital/surgery or clinic – this will reduce anxiety.

If the child asks you directly whether it will hurt, try to be honest as you don't want to lose their trust, a helpful response might be "It might hurt but only for a short time," or "We will use the magic cream to make it as comfy as possible," or "It might feel like a sharp scratch but as soon as it's done, we can get your treat."



## Role Play

Get a toy medical kit and practice taking pretend blood from a dolly, teddy or even a family member. Let the child take the lead role.

Some hospitals are happy to give you little bits and pieces of 'real' equipment to play with at home e.g cannulas (with the needle taken out) or surgical gloves or plasters etc - this can help familiarity and reduce fear so it is worth asking!

Watch online videos with your child to help them prepare.  
Visit [www.whatwhychildreninhospital.org.uk/blood-test](http://www.whatwhychildreninhospital.org.uk/blood-test)



## Control

Children of 3+ may like to draw up a 'contract' or plan (in writing or with pictures) – things they would like to happen during the blood test.

Let your child have some control where possible – even small decisions will help them feel they have input e.g. do they sit next to you / on your knee, do you go before / after school, what would they like to do while waiting for the numbing cream to work?

You can take this along as a reminder for the time when anxieties may be running high.

## Keeping Warm & Hydrated

Put an extra layer of clothing on your child in the hour before the test as this will help keep veins warm and close to the surface.

Treat your child to a hot chocolate before the test – some parents swear by this! Give your child a large drink in the hour before the test as being well hydrated increases the chances of success.

## Distraction

Take a bag of tricks for distraction (blowers, puzzles, favourite books, a balloon to blow up during the test, iPad etc) and consider keeping some toys/apps especially for these times so the child won't be bored of them.

Try and chat in a relaxed way (even if you fake the relaxed part!) during the procedure - ask your child if they can remind you of how a favourite story goes or get them to tell you about school. Little low key distractions can really help. Most children can't resist the chance to talk about themselves, so ask lots of interesting questions!

## Pain Relief

Get a Buzzy (some hospitals have these to borrow) [www.buzzy4shots.co.uk](http://www.buzzy4shots.co.uk) (a small handheld tens machine which 'buzzes' and confuses the nerve signals to the brain). Try watching the online video about it with your child before using it.

Experiment with how long the numbing cream needs to be on for maximum numbing effect. Some children may need longer than the time stated. Did you know that you can use cling film over it if your child is allergic to Tegaderm (clear sticky stuff they put over magic cream) or hates removing it?

'Cold spray' can be helpful for some as you avoid the waiting around but be aware that it might also give younger children a shock.

## What if things haven't gone well at a recent blood test?



- Let the team know so that they ensure your waiting time is kept to a minimum next time
- Ask to be referred to a play specialist
- Ask if your hospital would consider a pinprick test for a few months until things have settled down
- Ask to see the most experienced paediatric phlebotomist as they will always be quicker.
- Consider whether another adult could bring your child or at least come along with you - it might take the pressure off the situation

## When to make your child aware they have a blood test

Tell your child in advance, but not too far ahead. You will know your child best, but as a guideline:

- Under 6, tell them the same day
- Over 6, 2 or 3 days before
- Over 12, tell them far enough in advance so they can prepare



The information contained herein is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment in any manner. Always seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding any medical condition.

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