

TRYPANOPHOBIA--THE BIG SHOT

Trypanophobia is defined simply as an extreme fear of medically related shots/injections, it appears in several varieties. It is estimated that at least 10% of [American](#) adults are trypanophobic, and it is likely that the actual number is larger, because many simply avoid all medical treatment. I would guess this is the second most common reason most people avoid going to the dentist.

The most common type of trypanophobia, affecting 50% of trypanophobes, is an inherited [reflex](#). Approximately 80% of trypanophobes report that a relative within the first degree exhibits the same disorder. People who suffer from vaso-vagal trypanophobia fear the sight, thought or feeling of needles or needle-like objects. The primary symptom of vaso-vagal trypanophobia is [vasovagal syncope](#), or fainting due to a decrease of [blood pressure](#), which includes feeling faint, [sweating](#), [nausea](#), [pallor](#), [tinnitus](#), [panic attacks](#) and initially high blood pressure and heart rate followed by a plunge in both at the moment of injection.

We can help patients in several ways in the office. The most effective is usually nitrous oxide or laughing gas. This works wonders for many patients and is very easy to use, completely safe and relatively inexpensive. We also use a routine of topical anesthetic sprays or gels. These take some of the initial "pinch" out of the injection and is very effective for those who have been scarred by traumatic injections in the past. Another helpful tool we have is the "wand." This delivers the anesthetic (novocaine) at a controlled rate, and looks nothing like a typical injection syringe. The controlled rate is effective because most of the discomfort results from pressure of the anesthetic in the tissue. Most patients do not even realize they have had an injection. I have had many patients ask me afterwards "Oh, you don't use the shot anymore?"

Another possibility is behavioral therapy and hypnosis, which we do not do in the office, but we do have sources for referral. We can also refer patients for general anesthetic as well (completely "out"), though this option should not be taken lightly. Fear of needles is not just for whimps. [Jackie Chan](#), the martial art action movie star who performs all his own stunts, reportedly cannot be insured because he is terrified of needles.