

Trypanophobia is defined simply as an extreme fear of medically related shots/injections, it appears in *several varieties*. It's estimated that at least 10 percent 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 percent of trypanophobes, is an inherited reflex. Approximately 80 percent 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. Patients experience feeling faint, sweating, nausea, pallor, tinnitus, panic attacks and initially high blood pressure and high 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 treatments take some of the initial "pinch" out of the injection and are *very effective* for patients who *have* been scarred by traumatic injections in the past.

Another helpful tool we *have* is the "wand." This delivers the anesthetic (Novocain) 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.

In fact, many patients *have* asked me afterward, "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 also can refer patients for general anesthetic (completely "out") as well, 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.

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