

APPLIED TENSION TECHNIQUE - FOR PEOPLE WHO FAINT AT THE SIGHT OF BLOOD OR NEEDLES

Most people feel a bit uneasy when they see blood or have to get a needle. However, for some people seeing blood or needles causes them to faint or to feel like they will faint. It is very rare to actually faint from anxiety, unless you have this problem. If you tend to faint when you get an injection or have blood drawn you can benefit from learning a simple technique that will help you prevent fainting or speed up the recovery time if you do faint.

Why do some people faint at the sight of blood or a needle?

Fainting is caused by a sudden drop in your heart rate or blood pressure. When we are anxious, our heart rate and blood pressure actually go up. This is why it is so rare to faint when you are feeling anxious. However, some people with a fear of blood or needles experience an initial increase and then a sudden drop in their blood pressure, which can result in fainting. This drop in blood pressure is called the *vasovagal response*, and only a small minority of people have this response at the sight of blood or needles. The good news is, if you have this problem there is a way to prevent it and keep yourself from fainting.

In most cases, fainting is harmless. The sudden drop in blood pressure that results from the vasovagal response is not dangerous or life-threatening.



However, it is important that you discuss your fainting with a doctor before using this technique or exposing yourself to situations (such as needles or blood) that could cause fainting.

The Technique

The **Applied Tension Technique**¹ is a strategy developed to help prevent fainting or help people recover faster if they do faint. The technique involves tensing the muscles in your body, which then raises your blood pressure. If your blood pressure increases, you are less likely to faint.

¹ The Applied Tension Technique was developed by Lars-Göran Öst

How to Do It

- Sit in a comfortable chair and tense the muscles in your arms, legs and trunk for about 10 to 15 seconds. You should hold the tension until you start to feel a warm sensation in the head. Then, relax your body for 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat 5 times.



TIP: When you relax your muscles after tensing them, the goal is not to become completely relaxed, as this will cause your blood pressure to drop. Rather, the goal is to let your body return to a normal state (not overly tense or completely relaxed).

Practicing

- It is important that you practise this strategy several times a day for at least a week.

Using it with Exposure Exercises

- After you have practised this technique for at least a week, you can start using this strategy when doing exposure exercises to blood and needles. See modules on [Specific Phobia](#) and [Facing Your Fears - Exposure](#) for more information.

HELPFUL TIPS:

- ✓ **Speedy Recovery!** If you do faint, you can speed up your recovery by lying down and elevating your feet.
- ✓ **Tense & Relax!** If you tense your arm when you are receiving a needle, it can be more painful. Try to relax the arm that will be receiving the needle, while tensing the other parts of your body. However, since this can be difficult to do, it's important to practise before going to get a needle. Alternatively, you can use the tension technique before and after getting a needle, but try to release the tension in your body when you actually get the needle.
- ✓ **Warning!** If you develop a headache when trying the applied tension technique, try to reduce the level of tension or the frequency of practice sessions.
- ✓ **Warning Signs!** It can be helpful to learn to recognize the early signs of your blood pressure dropping, such as feelings of lightheadedness. Try to use the tension technique as soon as you start to experience these sensations.
- ✓ **Practise!** Even though this strategy sounds simple, it takes practice to be helpful!