

Blood Drawing Tips and Tricks for Prader-Willi Syndrome

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Does anyone enjoy a blood test? Yes! Some individuals with PWS really enjoy anything to do with visiting the doctor, including being examined, getting shots and blood tests. However, it can be technically difficult to get blood from a person with PWS. Low muscle tone and increased fat under the skin (even in slender people) may make finding the vein more difficult for the phlebotomist. Growth hormone deficiency seems to affect vein growth, and some children will develop bigger veins after they begin growth hormone therapy.

Early experiences are vital to setting a positive tone. Remember that fear rather than pain is the issue with most needle situations. An adult helper with strong negative feelings about needles or blood tests may not be the best coach for this situation. Since persons with PWS do not enjoy surprises or changes to routines and can worry if given too much information in advance, parents need to consider the perfect balance of information and timing before a visit.

Distraction is a helpful technique, but don't be surprised by children who want to watch the needle; many children find this essential to coping. Toys, music, soothing voices all help tremendously. If your child benefits from rewards, plan something small, like a sticker, for after the poke is finished. If your phlebotomist does a terrific job, be sure to remember their name and ask for them the next time you come.

Many pediatric settings have "poke programs" in place, and parents should ask about the latest options. Health care professionals also want a positive experience for your loved one and may have creative ideas.

Tips for a better blood draw:

1. Arrive well hydrated. A long car ride and very little to drink means that the veins will be flatter than normal and hard to enter.
2. Dress in clothing that allows easy access to the blood drawing area.
3. In cold weather, bundle up and make sure the arms are warm before the blood draw. Some people benefit from using a warming pack.
4. Alert the staff if there have been previous bad blood drawing experiences to request their most skilled and patient technologist. Two attempts per person should be the maximum allowed.
5. Request that the tourniquet be placed over clothing, not directly on the skin, where it can pinch and cause more pain than the needle itself.

6. There are a variety of topical (rubbed on the skin) numbing creams. These must be placed in advance and require a prescription but may be available in the blood drawing lab. While these products numb the skin, they do not prevent a person from being scared. They can take up to 30 minutes to be effective, so they are not for everyone.
7. Ask about Buzzy Bee, a vibration device that is a proven interceptor of needle pain. Buzzy is a distraction as well as pain disruptor.
8. There are a variety of “vein finders” which are placed on the skin. You are most likely to see these in the NICU or hospital setting.
9. While sugar is avoided in the PWS diet, neonatal research supports the effectiveness of a tiny drop of sugar water (sucrose) for pain control in new babies. This may be available in the blood drawing lab. There is no evidence that this helps children older than a few months.

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