

Comfort & Continuity: Managing Pain and Fear in Long-Acting Injectable (LAI) Medication Administration

For some patients, the fear of needles or the pain associated with injections is so great that it may prevent acceptance or continuation of LAI medication. Several techniques can be utilized to support patients in managing injection-related fear, discomfort, and anxiety.

Before Injection Day: Discuss Injections with Patients and Families

- ☐ Allow the patient to voice concerns and fears; acknowledge them.
- ☐ Follow up with questions to uncover underlying concerns and previous injection experiences.
- ☐ Engage in a conversation that allows the patient to explore their own motivations, preferences, and concerns.
- ☐ Answer patient questions about injectable medications and the administration process.
- ☐ Discuss options for managing pain and discomfort and work together to create a plan that supports patient comfort.
- ☐ Discuss coping strategies (see distraction techniques listed below) and other preferences that may help the patient feel comfortable during administration.
- ☐ Provide reminders before injection day.
- ☐ Avoid being directive or argumentative.

Examples of Supportive Questions:

Use Clinical Judgement on whether patient is able to engage in these conversations

- How do you feel about receiving injections?
- Can you tell me about any previous experiences with injections that were particularly difficult or upsetting?
- What physical symptoms do you experience when you're around needles (e.g., sweating, dizziness, nausea, rapid heartbeat)?
- Is it the needle, the pain, the sight of blood, or something else that causes the most anxiety?
- Have you found anything that helps you manage your anxiety during injections?
- Is there anything we can do to make the experience more comfortable for you?
- What are the benefits you see in this treatment despite your concerns about injections?
- What might help increase your confidence in receiving injections?

Medication Administration Day: Prepare the Environment

Ensure adequate clinic space that:

- ☐ Is free of hazards.
- ☐ Accommodates necessary equipment and supplies.
- ☐ Provides comfortable seating for the patient, with the ability to lie down if necessary.
- ☐ Allows space for a support person if allowable and desired.
- ☐ Provides privacy and minimizes interruptions.
- ☐ Allows for distraction aids/comfort items.
- ☐ Patient has choice to face away from injection equipment.

Medication Administration Day: Support the Patient During Administration

- ☐ Maintain a positive and supportive tone and approach.
- ☐ Review medical history, including history of fainting and level of fear or worry about injections.
- ☐ Review medication allergies and physician orders to verify correct medication order, date and time of administration
- ☐ Inspect medication as recommended by package insert prior to administering
- ☐ Use neutral language; avoid repetitive reassurance and words that may elicit fear
- ☐ Provide balanced information by describing expected sensations and duration and invite the patient to report how they feel.
- ☐ Upon request, show the patient the medication and describe the process.
- ☐ Follow the patient’s established preferences and comfort plan.

Avoid	Use Instead
“Relax”	“Let me know what position feels most comfortable”
This won’t hurt”	“You may feel pressure or a brief sensation during injection”
“You’re okay” (repeated reassurance)	“How are you feeling? Let me know if you need me to pause or adjust”

Distraction Techniques and Strategies to Minimize Injection Pain

Possible distraction techniques (where allowable) may include:

- Having a phone available for distraction if allowed per protocol/facility.
- Listening to music.
- Watch allowable videos as approved by Treatment Team/facility.
- Using challenging cognitive tasks (e.g., reciting the alphabet backwards, counting backwards from 100 by 7s, completing a challenging puzzle game).
- Using breathing techniques or other relaxation strategies.
- Holding a comfort item (e.g., stress ball, fidget item)
- Limiting or maximizing conversation during injection (depending on patient preferences)

Minimizing Injection Pain

- Consider topical anesthetics (e.g., numbing cream or patch) applied approximately 30–60 minutes before injection.
- Keep the LAI at room temperature as recommended by the manufacturer; cold medication may increase discomfort upon injection.
- Use vibration or cooling devices at the injection site to distract sensory nerves as ordered/applicable per physician order.
- Instruct the patient to lightly tap a distant part of the body during the injection to trigger mechanoreceptors and inhibit the brain’s perception of localized pain.
- Consider the cough technique: instruct the patient to cough once immediately before and once during the injection.
- Ensure the targeted muscle group is completely relaxed before injection.
- Apply gentle, sustained pressure after the injection, but avoid rubbing the site, as this may cause post-injection irritation.

After the Injection

- ☐ Monitor patient symptoms after injection.
- ☐ Educate the patient on possible post-injection reactions.
- ☐ Document the patient's tolerance of the injection and education provided on symptoms or injection-site reactions to report.
- ☐ Document review of preference plan/comfort plan and patient's response.
- ☐ Document patient's presentation prior to starting the LAI vs their current presentation.

A patient's experience with the first injection can influence future willingness to continue LAI treatment. Taking time to understand preferences, reduce discomfort, and document what works can support long-term treatment engagement.

Use this [Patient Comfort Plan](#) to document your patient's preferences for LAI medication administration. The information collected will help future LAI administrators provide a more comfortable, personalized, and patient-centered injection experience.

References

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