Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand

Managing Needle Anxiety

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Needle Anxiety Myth Busting

If someone is fine with insulin needles they'll be fine with dialysis needles

The best way to help someone with needle anxiety is to force them to have needles

There is always an event(s) that led to someone developing needle anxiety

If someone has tattoos they'll be fine with dialysis needles

Health professionals don’t have needle anxiety

Bringing Theory to Life

- Meet Tom:
- 52 yo Niuean man
- Living with wife and two teenage children
- Recently stopped working due to health
- T2DM and pre-dialysis

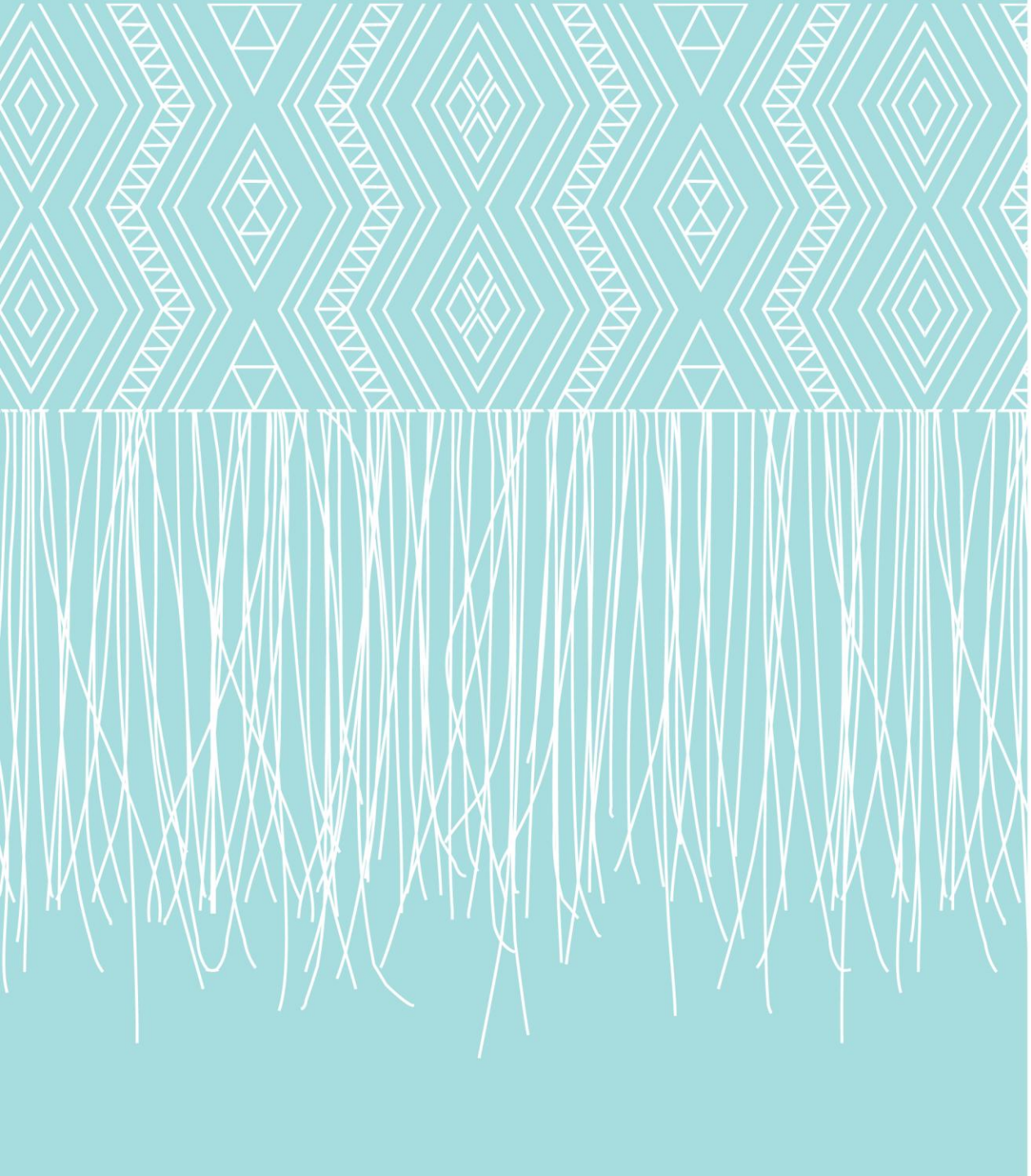


How common is needle anxiety?

What does this look like in renal care?

25-47%

Avoidance
Missed appointments
Missed medication
Not talking about health
Complications
Missed treatments/procedures eg fistula
Not choose home therapies
Die instead of having dialysis
Never take insulin despite being prescribed for years
Distress
Hidden



Tom Identified:
Couldn’t say word ‘needle’
Never taken insulin
Decided to die instead of have dialysis

Who to Ask?

Every tangata whaiora the first time you meet them

And then again when giving new treatments eg dialysis, blood tests, medications that use needles

And then again after any changes eg hospital admissions, trauma, procedures (eg fistulograms)



How to Ask?

How are you with needles?

Then follow up with different types of needles they need to use

Tom: All needles but idea of fistula needles the worst. Arterial worse than veinous.

- In renal care, needles are used for having dialysis, giving more iron if needed, blood tests and other cares such as managing diabetes. How are you with needles?
- What gets in the way of managing dialysis? Having a home therapy? How about needles?

Anxiety

Stress and worry

Discomfort

Some physiological symptoms

Distress

Affect such as anxiety, fear, stress.

Emotional and physiological response

Phobia: DSM-V

Marked and immediate fear/anxiety

Avoidance or endure with intense fear

Fear is out of proportion to threat

>6 months

Significant distress or impairment

Tom: Met criteria for blood-injection-injury phobia

Find Out:

Blood (draws vs injury blood)

Injection

Injury (eg needle harming body, veins, fistula)

Pain

Significant distress or avoidance

Location of distress and type

Cognitions – health, dialysis and medication perceptions, anxiety thoughts

Behaviours – what avoiding, endure with distress, 5 senses

More things to find out:

Physical sensations – when around or using needles such as HR increase, breathing increase, mind blank/thoughts racing, sweaty, clammy, dizzy, nausea, trembling, urge to escape

Emotions – anxiety, anger, down, numb, disgust, embarrassment, guilt, relief when over

Situations – more likely to occur in, people present etc

Do they faint?????

Is Treatable and Manageable

Be mindful of catching anxiety yourself

Practical Ways to Help

If whānau present ask if good for them to stay or increase anxiety

Creams

Overwhelm area with sensation – ice, pinching, Buzzy Bee, Tickleflex, Brave Buddy

Use a word other than ‘needle’ – ‘my friend’

Distraction

Playlist

Stress ball

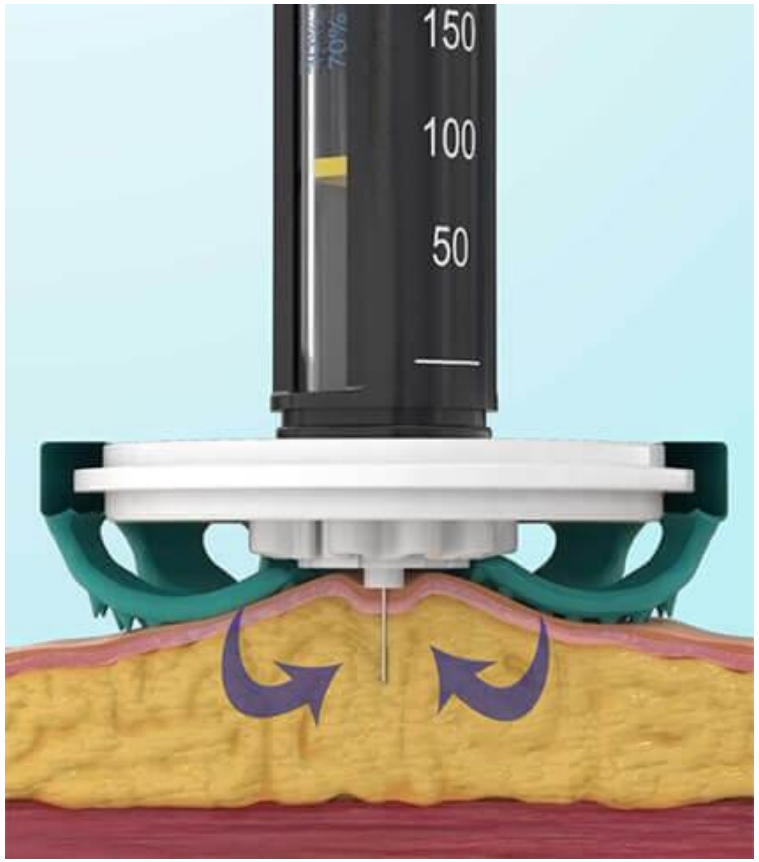
Diabetes technology eg pumps, CGMs

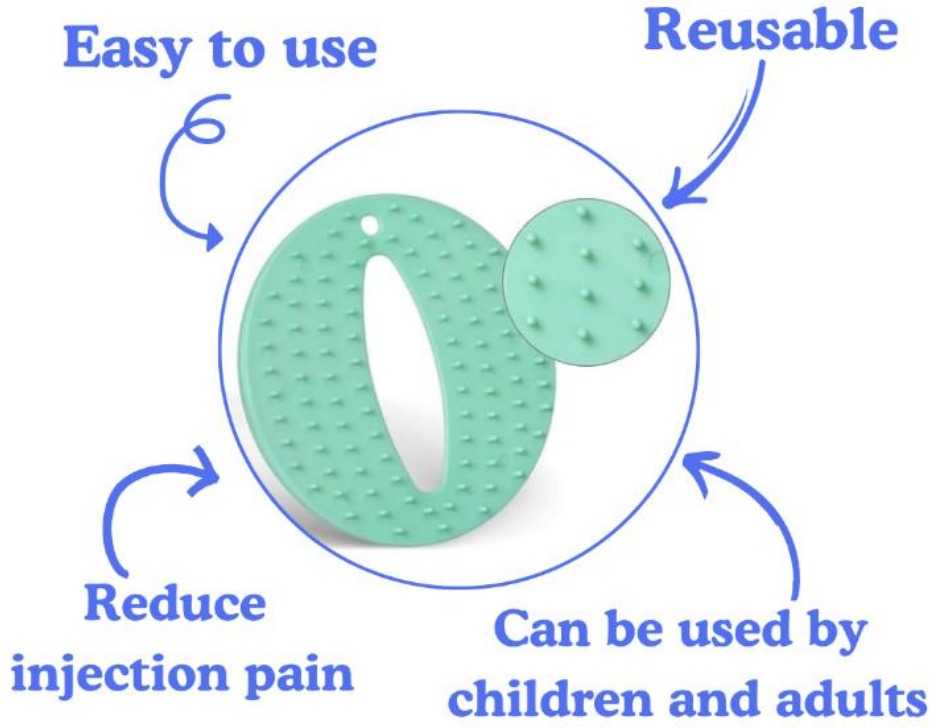
Strengths spotting – what has helped before

If prescribed once a day (or week) do first thing in morning

Tickleflex and Brave Buddy







$20

$24.99

Relaxation and Thought Reframing

Relaxation:

Breathe out then do

Deep breathing

Progressive Muscle

Box breathing

Grounding:

5 senses

Place, date, time

Thoughts:

Don't delay, just do

For my health and whānau

I can do this

This will improve my health

It will get easier the more I do it

Expectation

If faint:

Applied muscle tension

Practice 3 times a day. Squeeze muscles for 15 secs, release for 30 secs, repeat until finished or faintness passes.

Hold stress ball

Lie down

Graded Exposure Therapy

Step by step until habituate

Stay in the situation if possible to habituate and learn that anxiety goes down

Imaginal exposure, virtual reality, in-vivo

Sell the treatment

Teach skills to manage anxiety

Establish fear hierarchy with SUDS

Visual aids, progress graphs, write things down

Reward with praise to reinforce

Tom's Steps: Breathing and thoughts for kaimahi doing needling

Saying 'needle'

Seeing needle

Holding needle

Practising with an orange

Taking venous out…Putting arterial in

Useful Websites

- **Centre for clinical interventions:** https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/
- https://homedialysis.org/documents/ready-set-home/overcoming-needle-fear.pdf
- **Just a Thought:** https://www.justathought.co.nz/courses
- **https://mentalhealth.org.nz/media/rhqontn5/tips-for-overcoming-needle-phobia_2025-1.pdf**



Patai?

