Applied tension record

For an assessed fainting response, after healthcare advice. Breathe normally; do not strain or hold your breath.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

Suitability and changes agreed with clinician

Agreed position / muscles to use or avoid

1 Tighten the agreed muscles for about 10-15 seconds.

2 Ease back to normal muscle tone for about 20-30 seconds.

3 Repeat up to five cycles, or use the adaptation agreed with your clinician.

Cycle	Practice / adaptation	What I noticed; any reason to stop
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Discomfort or questions to discuss

If I feel faint: my agreed plan

What to agree before practice or a procedure

Stop if faint or unwell and follow the response agreed with your clinician.

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Using this resource

Applied tension record

What this helps with

Applied tension uses brief muscle tightening to help counter a blood-pressure drop in people with an assessed tendency to faint around blood, injury or needles. It is not a relaxation exercise and is not needed for everyone with a phobia. Ask a healthcare professional whether it is appropriate, particularly if you have a medical condition or pain. Learn the technique without a feared trigger first, using the instructions agreed for your circumstances.

How to use it

1. Confirm suitability, a supported sitting position and which muscles to use with your clinician.
2. If advised, tighten large muscles in arms, torso and legs for about 10-15 seconds, without straining or holding your breath.
3. Return to ordinary muscle tone for around 20-30 seconds, without deliberately relaxing deeply.
4. If advised, repeat up to five cycles. Keep face and head relaxed and adapt any painful area.
5. Record practice and concerns; only combine it with exposure or a procedure as professionally agreed.

A fictional worked example

Ben had a medically assessed history of fainting with blood tests. His healthcare professional explained applied tension and checked how he could practise comfortably while seated. He initially tried too hard and held his breath, so they adjusted the effort and practised breathing normally. He recorded the agreed timing and how the exercise felt, without looking at blood or needles. Before his next test he told the nurse about his history and followed her positioning instructions. He did not tense the arm being used for the procedure; the nurse advised how to adapt his plan. The aim was safe participation, not eliminating every anxious feeling.

Keep in mind

Use only after professional agreement. Stop if practice causes pain, headache, breathlessness or feeling faint; sit or lie safely and seek advice. Follow staff instructions during procedures, including keeping the procedure arm still. Applied tension does not replace assessment or emergency care.

Sources and attribution

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust. (2024). Needle phobia and overcoming your fear.

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

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