

Tip of the Month



Listen to the Skin

I am the skin you are about to stab with that needle. And let me say right up front that I don't like you. It has a lot to do with the fact that you have every intention of putting a hole in me. Maybe more than one, depending on how good you are. But I know why you are doing this, and that's what makes it okay. You are trying to help my owner, the person I have wrapped myself around since Day One. We are very close. VERY close. So be gentle.

I know you have to pass that needle through me to get to the vein I'm covering up, but I want to let you in on a little secret first. I HAVE FEELINGS! When your needle goes searching for blood, Mr. Vein doesn't feel a thing. But when it goes through me, buddy, IT HURTS! So do me a favor. In fact, do me several favors, and we'll get along just fine.

First, make sure the alcohol is dry before you stick that thing through me. You have no idea how much that stuff stings when it's wet. Secondly, if you don't mind, could you use a smaller needle? I know you're in a hurry and that 21 gauge needle speeds things up for you by about two whole seconds, but pretend you're me. What would you rather have pass through you, a needle or a nail? Unless the test you're drawing doesn't allow it, use a 22 or 23. Surely you can spare a few more seconds for my sake, can't you?

Thirdly, do you mind pulling the skin down with the thumb of your free hand a little more? Not only will it keep Mr. Vein from wiggling away from your needle, but when you stretch me tight, I hardly even feel the needle go through me. If you don't, the nerves within me go ballistic, sending pain signals right up to the boss. And I have to warn you, the boss is a little grumpy this morning.

And finally, if you're drawing blood from the antecubital area, use the vein in the center. Not only will that keep your needle clear from nerves and the brachial artery, but I happen to know first-hand that there are fewer nerves in me above that vein than above the other two veins you have to choose from.

Just those four favors; that's all I'm asking. Work with me on this and I'll see to it that the nerves don't tell the boss that you just stuck a needle into him. Nothing pleases the boss more than that when it comes to needles. And who knows, my boss just might tell your boss how good you are.

Draw blood painlessly enough times on enough people and you might just get yourself a reputation. Before long, you'll find yourself on the receiving end of the five most satisfying words in healthcare:

"I didn't even feel that!"