

EASING DENTAL-RELATED ANXIETY

Going to the dentist can cause anxiety, and that's a normal reaction. It's estimated that between 15 and 40 percent of people are affected by dental anxiety.



If not addressed, dental anxiety can lead to unnecessary oral health problems as a result of avoidance behavior, which can ultimately lead to more time spent in the dental chair to receive more extensive and potentially costly treatment.

Why do people experience dental-related anxiety?

There are many causes of dental anxiety:

- The fear of pain
- Feeling as if you are not in control or are helpless
- Feeling embarrassed about the condition of your teeth
- Recalling your own past experiences or the experiences of your family and friends
- The fear of needles, drills and gagging
- Anticipating costly and/or extensive treatment

What can I do to alleviate dental anxiety?

- Talk with your dentist. He or she can help dispel any negative or frightening perceptions you may have. Having an understanding of your dental health and the dental services or treatment that you and your dentist have discussed and decided upon will help to relieve dental anxiety. Ask questions, and request informational materials.
- Avoid caffeine and sugar before a dental appointment; they may make you anxious.
- Schedule dental appointments early in the day, before you have the chance to become stressed or rushed.
- Focus on relaxing. Breathe regularly and slowly during the procedure. When you are nervous you tend to hold your breath, which decreases oxygen levels and further increases feelings of panic.
- Use hand signals to inform the dentist when you are uncomfortable.

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What if my self-relaxation attempts don't work?

Before your appointment, you can ask your dentist about sedation. There are different types of sedation methods. The most common are inhaled (breathing in a mixture of nitrous oxide and oxygen) and oral (taking a medication by mouth). Another type is intravenous (IV) sedation. Sedation will make you feel more relaxed and even sleepy. It is safe when administered by a trained dentist, but it's important that you talk with your dentist about any potential risks and questions that you have.

Regular six-month preventive checkups help detect oral health problems early and acquaint you with the dental office and procedures you may feel anxious about. Remember: When it comes to dental anxiety, knowledge is the greatest defense.