

Reducing Dental Anxiety

A dental visit can cause some people great stress and anxiety. The anxiety can come from a fear of injections, the sound of a drill, or simply bright overhead lights. While fear of pain is at the top of the list, fear of losing control or worry from embarrassment prevent many people from seeking dental services. Some estimates report between 10 to 15 percent of people avoid necessary dental work due to anxiety or fear.

Individuals experience varying levels of dental anxiety. Some people may lose sleep the night before a dental visit. Others may experience feelings of nausea or rapid heartbeat. Individuals who have had a bad past experience in the dentist office have a greater chance of experiencing more severe anxiety.

Adult Dental Anxiety

Dental anxiety in adults is often caused from a childhood incident that left long-lasting emotional scars. Novocain that didn't take effect before the dentist began drilling, being reprimanded for crying during a dental visit, or simply a poor chairside manner can all lead to dental anxiety in adults.

Talking with your dentist about your fears is important, as they can work with you to alleviate your concerns. Simply explaining every step of the process, including sounds and instruments, can go a long way in reducing anxiety. Many dentists today offer noise-cancelling headphones, and listening to iPods helps reduce outside noises like drills. Talk to your dentist about pain management options if you experience a fear of needles. For those who suffer from extreme anxiety, your dentist might prescribe a sedative to take before your appointment.

Child Dental Anxiety

Parents can take several steps to lessen children's anxiety before a dental visit, and the best step is prevention. Early and regular visits to your family dentist will slowly acclimate youngsters to the dental office, with chairs, lights, sounds and smells that can be frightening to little ones. Once the first tooth comes in, your toddler can visit the dentist for a general checkup and to learn how to brush their teeth. Watching parents or older siblings get a routine cleaning will help children get used to the environment and ease their worry, and even playing dentist at home can help young ones learn what to expect.

For children who experience anxiety, a pediatric dentist is recommended. Pediatric dentists have specific training to work with young children, and are often more at ease treating very young patients than a general dentist might be, which translates to less anxiety for the child.

If you or your child are still experiencing anxiety or feel uncomfortable after trying several different remedies, consider finding a new dentist. You simply may need a dentist with a different personality that you feel more comfortable with, a smaller office, or a dentist of a different sex. Don't feel bad about switching dentists. Your care and comfort should always be your – and your dentist's – top priority.