



DENTAL FEAR & ANXIETY

Don't let your fear keep you out of the chair

If your palms start sweating and your heart starts pounding at the thought of visiting the dentist, you are not alone. The vast majority of individuals experience some anxiety toward dentistry. However, about 10 to 15 percent of the population suffers from high dental anxiety, which has been associated with avoidance behaviors and adverse outcomes to dental health. It's important to find ways to "unlearn" this dental fear because when dental professionals can catch a problem in your mouth early, it minimizes expense, time and discomfort. Here are some ideas:



- The first step is to identify

where your fear came from. According to a recent AAP survey, periodontists report that the two most common origins for patient fear are family and friends or personal bad experience more than 10 years ago. Discuss your fear with family members, friends and your dental professionals. In many cases, the fears are no longer realistic because of advances in dentistry.

- Next, find ways to feel more in control of your experience. Ask your periodontist to explain any procedures being considered. Knowledge can be empowering. Your periodontist can also explain your options for techniques to control pain and stress, such as medications, anesthesia, sedation and relaxation techniques that can make your treatment virtually pain-

free. And, you and your periodontist can agree on a signal, such as a raised hand, that will stop the procedure and allow you the opportunity to deal with your anxiety.

- Choose times for your appointments when you won't be rushed or stressed by other issues. If you feel tense when you get into the dental chair, try relaxation techniques such as rhythmic breathing or visualizing calming scenarios, such as relaxing on a beach. Or, distract yourself with a Walkman or by focusing on something in the room.

- Once the dental visit is over, congratulate yourself for your courage and treat yourself to a special reward.

- Most importantly, remember that your dental professionals are your allies. Enlist their help in overcoming your fear by not being embarrassed to talk with them about it and by asking any questions you may have. 🎵

Many periodontal procedures can be pain-free

It's been "drilled" into our minds by family members and friends and experiences from long ago: our fear of dental treatments. However, according to a recent online poll of periodontists conducted by the AAP, many more patients indicate they have a fear about receiving periodontal treatment prior to treatment than say they felt extreme discomfort or pain following treatment.

Of the 164 periodontists polled, almost half said that more than 50 percent of their patients indicate they are fearful about receiving periodontal treatment. However, more than three-quarters said less than 10 percent of their patients say periodontal treatments actually cause them any extreme discomfort or pain. Many respondents said establishing

trust with patients goes a long way in alleviating fear.

Periodontists report that it's men and middle-aged adults who are most likely to fear periodontal procedures. While 47 percent of those surveyed said that male patients are more often fearful, only 11 percent find their female patients to be the more fearful gender. And, more than half chose adults in their 40s and 50s as the most fearful age group, compared to younger and older age groups. Specifically, they said their patients are most likely to be afraid of feeling pain and needles.

The survey also revealed that the top origins of fear are family

and friends or a personal bad experience more than 10 years ago.

The vast majority (84 percent) of respondents said that they have implemented specific procedures to help patients deal with their fear during treatment, and 59 percent said they'd implemented procedures in the past three years that actually make periodontal treatment more comfortable. In addition, some periodontists mentioned that improvements in local anesthesia, pain and anxiety medications, and in some cases, conscious sedation, have made many procedures performed at the periodontist's office virtually pain-free. 🎵

The American Academy of Periodontology Patient Page is a public service of the AAP and should not be used as a substitute for the care and advice of your personal periodontist. There may be variations in treatment that your periodontist will recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Call 1-800-FLOSS-EM for a free brochure on periodontal disease.

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