

# Easing Dentistry-related Anxiety

Going to the dentist can cause anxiety, and that's a normal reaction. You can overcome this fear by educating yourself and talking with your dentist and the dental team. Read on to learn more about dental anxiety and what you can do to overcome your fears.

## Why do people experience dentistry-related anxiety?

There are many causes of dental anxiety. Among them are:

- Fear of pain
- Feeling like you are not in control or are helpless
- Embarrassment about the condition of your teeth
- Your own past experiences, or experiences of your family and friends
- Fear of needles, drills, and gagging
- Costly and/or extensive treatment

Though many people share in these fears, they can be overcome by talking with your dentist and his or her dental team.

## How can my dentist help?

Staff members at your dentist office have been trained to help you understand what you can expect during a procedure or appointment. If you better understand what is going to happen during your visit, it will help to ease your anxiety. So ask lots of questions and request informational materials prior to treatment.

## What can I do to relax?

Before your appointment, it's best to avoid caffeine and sugar, which can



increase anxiety. While you are in the waiting room, distract yourself: browse through magazines, listen to music via your headphones, or watch television if one is available. Prior to treatment, share any concerns you have with your dentist.

While you are receiving treatment, focus on your breathing—don't hold your breath. When you do so, your oxygen levels decrease, which increases anxiety. If you require follow-up care, schedule your appointment at a time that is convenient for you, so you won't feel rushed. Also, if you have questions about your treatment after you return home, call your dentist. It's better to ask than to just wonder or worry. Talking with your dentist will likely ease your concerns.

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

Prior to 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, even sleepy. Sedation is safe when administered by a trained dentist, but it's important that you talk with your dentist about any potential risks.

Make sure to talk with your dentist if you're experiencing anxiety before, during, or after your dental appointments. He or she can provide helpful tips or treatment to make your trip to the dentist more enjoyable.