

New Services May Help Millions Manage Dental Anxiety

Millions of Americans dread visiting the dentist. In fact, an estimated 30-to-40 million¹ avoid going to the dentist because of anxiety or fear. Delta Dental is raising awareness about dental phobia, a condition that affects many Americans.

"Avoiding the dentist because of fear or phobia may cause an individual's minor untreated dental problems to develop into severe oral health conditions and, in rare cases, even death," says Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. "It is unfortunate that these individuals may not be receiving the dental care they need. Regular dental cleanings, exams, x-rays, and dental treatment services recommended by your dentist are vital to good oral health."

There are many reasons why people develop dental phobia. The most common cause is a traumatic dental experience. Children are also often influenced by their parents' fears and squeamish attitudes towards dental treatment. Dental phobia may involve fear of dentists, dental procedures, needles, or situations that remind the sufferer of a phobic situation. The dentist's drill is often a major factor in these fears.

"People should share their concerns with their dentist or dental hygienist," says Anderson. "The dental team will determine ways to make the exam more comfortable."

If your dentist does not take your fear seriously, you may need to find a dentist who better understands dental phobia. There are ways to work with a dentist to reduce the anxiety.



For instance, ask your dentist to explain what is happening during every stage of the exam. Another strategy is to establish a hand signal to let the dentist know when to take a break.

Increasingly, more dental offices offer services that help patients manage their anxiety, including:

- Relaxation techniques – such as breathing exercises
- Virtual reality eyewear
- Headsets with music or calming nature sounds

Other options for extreme dental anxiety and pain reduction include forms of sedation via medications that are administered intravenously, orally, or through inhalation. Since there are risks associated with these various approaches to sedation and anesthesia, talk to your dentist about any special state permit or training program governing these services, and discuss which therapy is right for you.

¹Krochak, Dr. Michael. "What is Dental Phobia?" *Dentalfear.net* 2008