

Conquering Dental Phobia...

Studies show that a large portion of patients avoid the dentist for one simple reason...fear. Often, this fear results from a previous bad dental experience. Phobias of the drill and fear of dental injections (shots) are often cited as other reasons for avoiding dental care. Simply put, there are a lot of people who have ongoing dental pains because they are afraid to go to the doctor.

Fear not (no pun intended), there are solutions to this problem. Behavioral psychology tells us that the number one way to address a dental phobia is to find a comfortable office and a dentist and team you can trust. This is a good long term solution, but sometimes it takes a little more than empathy to overcome a lifelong fear. Modern dentistry can address that too.

Nitrous oxide, commonly called laughing gas, is a great way to boost your confidence in the dental chair. The inhaled gas is a sedative that helps patients to relax during treatment. It can be titrated (adjusted) weaker or stronger as the appointment goes along. Nitrous oxide is extremely safe and has the advantage of wearing off immediately after the gas mask is removed.

For those with a little more to overcome, stronger sedatives can be taken by mouth to help relax before dental appointments. There are a variety of different medications that can be used to produce different levels of drowsiness. These can be supplemented with laughing gas to make patients even more relaxed. Common oral sedatives are very safe, but their disadvantage in the dental office is that you have to have a driver bring you to and from your appointments.

Finally, for those with insurmountable anxiety, dental care can be delivered, usually in a hospital setting, under intravenous sedation or general anesthesia. This is where patients are put totally "under" or asleep for dental treatment. This is a common practice for removal of wisdom teeth, complex dental surgeries, and small children who are not old or cooperative enough to be orally sedated.

No matter what your level of fear may be, there's probably a way to receive quality dental care. After a few good visits with a team that you like, you'll probably need nothing at all.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send comments to Drs. Parrish at www.ParrishDental.com.