



DENTAL ANXIETY

A fear of the dentist can range from nervousness to anxiety or a phobia. Sometimes it is caused by an unpleasant experience and sometimes it is a worry of the unknown. Individuals with dental anxiety or phobia often avoid dental visits, resulting in poor oral and dental health such as cavities and periodontal disease. Delaying care for long periods results in complicated dental issues that may have been prevented.

Dentists and their dental teams are familiar with dental anxiety and will try to make your visit as comfortable as possible.

Discuss it with the dentist

If you have dental anxiety or a low tolerance to dental pain, share that when you make your appointment. The dental team may suggest coping strategies, such as:

- Bring headphones to wear so you can listen to your favorite music or audiobook instead of the drill.
- Bring a stress ball to squeeze or a small handheld object like a fidget spinner.
- Visualize your favorite place.
- Practice mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing exercises to relax tense muscles. First inhale slowly, counting the breaths. Then exhale for the same number of counts. Do that five times while you are waiting for your appointment, or during breaks while sitting in the dental chair.
- Concentrate on relaxing your muscles from your forehead, to your cheeks, to your neck, and down to your toes.¹

When you arrive, remind the dentist and hygienist about your anxiety. Knowing what will happen reduces anxiety, so ask questions. Let your dentist and dental hygienist know that when you raise your hand during your exam, you need to take a break.

For more information

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-622-4540 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2020. Anxiety. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 16, 2020 from <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/a/anxiety>

24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

Revised: 07/2020

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