



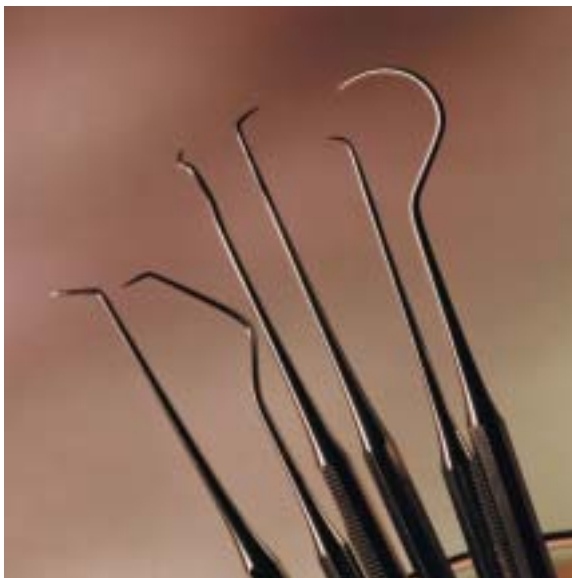
cap600
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Why do many people still fear the dentist?

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Many people are so frightened of the dentist that they will not go for dental treatment. These fears are often deep seated and stem back to childhood experiences. But dentistry has changed.

Dentists today are sympathetic about these feelings and a host of nerve-soothing techniques can take the fear out of a trip to the practice.



Why are so many people afraid of the dentist?

Negative childhood experiences

A previous bad experience – often many years ago during childhood – is the most common reason why people fear the dentist. But there have been huge advances in the industry and now dentistry is virtually pain-free. A person's first experience may have been as a young child in pain, when the unfortunate dentist had to do something to relieve that discomfort.

The intimate mouth

The mouth is an intimate part of our body, and having somebody working on it can threaten our personal space, make us frightened and feel like an invasion of privacy. Lying in the chair makes us feel vulnerable – especially as you have to stay still while the dentist drills millimetres away from perhaps an exposed nerve. Our imagination can send our anxiety levels soaring.

Negative media images

Images of dentists, like the eighteenth century cartoon of the tooth surgeon or the film Marathon Man, feed our innate fears of suffering pain while conscious. Even though local anaesthetic is widely used today, your imagination can exaggerate the small amount of discomfort.

Removing the fear

Dentistry has moved on over the past few years. Now, dentists recognise that some patients feel fearful and take special measures to help them deal with and overcome that fear. So work with your dentist to keep your mouth healthy. Regular check-ups will actually keep you away from the dental chair for longer.

How to banish dental fear

Confront your fear

Recognise the fear and decide that you want to do something about it. Probably, the greatest dental hurdle that you face is your fear of dentistry itself. This can stop you seeking early dental care and prevent disease. Doing nothing may mean that ultimately you need far more dental work to save your teeth. Share your concerns with your dentist.

Find out more

Information gives you power and therefore control over your own health. There is much that can be done to deal with your fear. Don't be afraid to ask for advice and information about dental fear – and ways of treating it. Equally, the onus is on dentists to educate, through individual consultation and the media.

Evaluate your dentist

He or she will play a crucial role in alleviating fear. Find a dental clinic that is planned and designed to be emotion friendly, relaxing and non-frightening. Look for evidence that the attitude of the dentists and their staff is supportive and encouraging. Look for signs that the practice is concerned about preventative care and quality treatment at all times.

Benefit from modern techniques

Be aware that the dentist must have patience in both administering the local anaesthetic (slowly!) and waiting for it to take effect.

There are also lots of helpful techniques, for example nitrous oxide and oxygen, popularly called happy gas. It is commonly used for women in labour, so you can be sure that it is really safe. Happy gas is almost instantly reversible and so the patient comes back to normal within minutes and can return to work immediately. Some practitioners also use hypnosis and acupuncture.

Be involved

During treatment, involve yourself in the decision-making process. Have the dentist show you, with tools like oral cameras, where the problem is and how it is being solved. The more you can project your mind to the thought of having healthier teeth, the less vulnerable you'll feel and the greater will be your comfort level.

In the end, you can only banish fear through a conscious building process. Let the dentist reassure you with a gentle, caring and relaxed approach.

Try to understand more – which will increase your level of confidence. Together this will reduce and, hopefully, eliminate your anxiety about dental care.

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