



Why am I anxious in the dental office?

People are anxious about going to the dentist for different reasons, including worrying about the effectiveness of localized anesthetic and feeling like the dentist is rushed or is neglecting your concerns. Other factors include anticipation of pain, the cost of the procedure, past experiences, and even the sterile smell of the dental office. Interrupting the normal day's routine to visit the dentist also is a factor in general anxiety.

What does my dentist do to relieve my anxiety?

Your dentist works to reduce your anxiety before you ever step foot in the dental office. This process begins on the phone, while making appointments. Your dentist's office staff has been trained in caring patient services; and they will inform you of what to expect and answer your questions to ensure your confidence and comfort during your visit. Once you arrive for your appointment, your dentist has done a lot to ensure that every aspect of your visit is designed to create optimal comfort. He or she has made sure to keep the waiting room neat and clean, and filled it with magazines and dental health information and resources. Some dental offices set aside a small portion of the waiting room as a play area for children. Others offer distractions such as television, music and even virtual reality glasses in the operator. An understanding of your dental health and the dental services or treatment that you and your dentist have discussed and decided will help to relieve dental anxiety. Ask questions and request informational materials.

How will my dentist handle my child's anxiety?

Some children are anxious because they are visiting the dentist's office for the first time. This experience into the unknown is a common reason for nervousness. The dentist or a member of his or her staff will talk directly with the child to make him or her more comfortable. Ask your dentist to take your child on a tour of the office, explaining various equipment along the way. For young children, especially those under three years, a parent or relative may accompany the child throughout the procedure. Older children are encouraged to show independence.

What can I do to relieve dental anxiety?

Knowledge is the greatest defense against anxiety. Avoiding caffeine before a dental appointment can make you less anxious. Eating high-protein foods produces a calming effect, unlike sugary foods. During the procedure, focus on breathing regularly and slowly. When you are nervous you tend to hold your breath, which decreases oxygen levels and further increases feelings of panic. If you have specific fears, talk to your dentist about them. He or she can go a long way to dispel any negative or frightening images you may have.

If you are looking for a dentist, ask friends and relatives for recommendations. A glowing review from someone you trust about a dentist can significantly reduce anxiety. You can also find a dentist by calling the Academy of General Dentistry's toll-free service 1-877-2X-A-YEAR (1-877-292-9327). Give the operator your zip code and you'll receive the names of three Academy members in your area.

If you are seeing a new dentist for the first time, schedule an appointment for a visit. Take the opportunity to ask this dentist a few questions and be sure to address your concerns. You'll find that dentists who take the time to speak with you about these matters will be understanding when it comes to addressing your fears.

The Academy of General Dentistry is a non-profit organization of more than 35,000 general dentists dedicated to staying up-to-date in the profession through continuing education. A general dentist is the primary care provider for patients of all ages and is responsible for the diagnosis, treatment, management and overall coordination of services related to patient's oral health needs. Learn more about AGD member dentists or find more information on dental health topics at www.agd.org/consumer.

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