



# FEAR NOT

If you “Google” the words “dental fear,” more than 2 million references appear. That’s not surprising because as many as 40 million Americans suffer from some form of dental anxiety. However, recent advances in dentistry can help many of those individuals who may become “down in the mouth” just thinking about visiting their dentist.

According to the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS), a serious form of dental fear is called “dental phobia,” which is a condition that leaves patients panic-stricken at even just the thought of going to the dentist. Individuals suffering from dental phobia are aware that their fear is irrational, and yet they are unable to do anything about it. Dental phobics will do everything possible to avoid the dentist and will seek dental care only when they are suffering from extreme pain. However, delaying a trip to the dentist can result in additional oral health problems, and consequently, additional expenses.

There are a number of reasons why people suffer from dental phobia, including the loss

of control, embarrassment, or a previously difficult or painful experience. Another fundamental reason people suffer from dental phobia is the fear of pain. The worry and anticipation over any pain associated with a dental procedure is too overwhelming for them, so many avoid the dentist altogether—until serious oral health problems arise. But some of the latest advances in dentistry may help to change this.

Many dentists now offer the use of sedatives that can reduce anxiety in patients suffering from dental phobia. This effect can be achieved through drugs administered either intravenously or orally, or with the use of nitrous oxide sedation. When patients become sedated, they usually become relaxed. Soon their anxiety is diminished and they are ready to accept treatment.

The American Dental Association (ADA) strongly supports the use of this technique in the treatment of dental patients and is committed to ensuring its safe and effective use by educationally and clinically qualified dentists and staff.

Hate the thought of a needle? Topical anesthesia, sometimes referred to as numbing gel, may be applied to gums before an injection is given so that the pain of the needle is diminished. This topical anesthesia agent is typically applied to the injection site with a cotton swab.

Advances in dentistry are helping to change the way many patients view the dentist’s chair. However, the most important step to overcoming a dental phobia is finding a dentist who makes you feel calm and relaxed through communication and by understanding your fears. Look for a dentist who will listen to your concerns, help you through your fear, and not be judgmental. It takes a true partnership between patient and dentist, a trusting relationship that will enable you to maintain great oral health and obtain the care you need.

For more information on dental fear, contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at **(800) 342-8747**. And visit the *Find a Dentist* page on the MDS Web site at [www.massdental.org](http://www.massdental.org) for a listing of dentists close to where you live or work. 

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