



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**October 15, 2007**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
**Michelle Sanford, (800) 342-8747**

**Latest Technologies Can Help  
Root Out "Fear Factor"**

When the words "dental fear" are searched on the Internet, more than two million references appear. That's not surprising because as many as 40 million Americans suffer from some form of dental anxiety.

However, more recent advances in dentistry can help many 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 over 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. "Even with the many advances made in dentistry, dental phobics will do everything possible to avoid the dentist and will go only when they are suffering from extreme pain," says Dr. Morton Rosenberg, an MDS member and professor of oral and maxillofacial surgery, head division of anesthesia and pain control at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine. Delaying a trip to the dentist can result in additional oral health problems and consequently, additional expenses.

There are a number of reasons that 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. Many, therefore, avoid the dentist altogether until serious oral health problems arise. However, 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 the intravenous administration of drugs, the use of nitrous-oxide oxygen sedation, or taken orally. "When patients become sedated, they usually become relaxed so their anxiety is diminished, and they are ready to accept treatment," says Dr. Rosenberg. The American Dental Association (ADA) strongly supports allowing appropriately trained dentists to use this technique to help dental patients and is committed to ensuring its safe and effective use. To ensure the safety of patients receiving sedation, the ADA and the MDS recommend that any dentist and staff utilizing these techniques be educationally and clinically qualified.

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 or Q-tip®.

Even dental drills could be a thing of the past soon due to the advancement of lasers. Lasers are high-technology instruments that produce a beam of concentrated light in short pulses to remove areas of infection or tooth decay with great precision. The

benefits of laser dentistry include reduced drilling noise, a speedier healing process, and less need for anesthesia.

However, according to the MDS, 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 a patient and a dentist and a trusting relationship that will enable patients to maintain great oral health and obtain the care they need," says Dr. Rosenberg.

For more information on dental fear, contact the Massachusetts Dental Society at **(800) 342-8747** or 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.

###