

## What scares you about going to the dentist?

Do you look forward to going to the dentist? For the majority of people reading this, my guess is a resounding “no.” In fact, I would like to confess something to you...I am one of those people! I am not talking about routine dental cleanings and X-rays, because most people can tolerate these procedures well. But for those of you who have had or needed substantial dental work in the past, you may be more familiar with this “dreaded” feeling. The good news is that dentistry has changed so drastically in the past decade, that many of your fears may no longer be a problem. New techniques as well as technology are making dental appointments faster, pain free and much more manageable (I will refrain from using the word “enjoyable.”).

This month I wanted to identify some common dental fears and share with you how we have improved our patients’ dental experience.

Dental phobias can be a result of a multitude of things, including having a previous traumatic experience at the dentist. For example; having a tooth being worked on that wasn’t completely numb, having trouble breathing while having work done, or maybe just the overall unpleasant noises and tastes involved in dental procedures. One traumatic dental experience in someone’s life can cause a lifetime of fear and anxiety. We see patients who haven’t been to the dentist in years because they’re afraid of coming in. Unfortunately, dental problems don’t fix themselves and delaying treatment

often results in more invasive and expensive procedures.

**Here are some of the more common dental phobias:**

**1. Fear of Pain:** First and foremost, dentistry should **NOT** hurt! The effectiveness of today’s anesthetics will make any procedure painless. I make sure that if any of my patients are feeling discomfort to let me know and I immediately stop and give more anesthetic. There is no reason why anyone should be “white knuckling” it throughout a procedure. Not only is this avoidable for our patients, but it is extremely stressful for your dentist, so please let your dentist know if you are uncomfortable or not numb enough.

**2. Fear of “The Shot”:** Just the fear and anxiety of anticipating the “shot,” can keep people away from the dentist. Luckily, many improvements have been made to avoid the pain of a dental injection. The topical anesthetics (gel used to numb the tissue before a shot) we use in our office are the some of the strongest topical ointments used in medicine. Not only do they work amazingly, but we use them on **EVERY** patient and allow them to start working before we perform our injection. The majority of my patients actually comment about how much dental injections have improved.

**3. Fear of Gagging:** For some patients, the fear of choking on something or gagging during a procedure is enough to keep them from scheduling a dental appointment. A recent study concluded that patients who have a higher frequency of gagging problems during a dental visit are more likely to experience higher levels of dental care-related fear and fear of pain, as well as to have more negative beliefs about

dental professionals and dental treatment. Rest assured that this is not something you need to worry about. Nitrous or laughing gas can often be used to relax patients, which in turn almost completely eliminates the gag reflex. With newer technology some dental procedures can even be completed with a simple picture rather than an impression.

In addition newer x-ray machines can even take pictures of your teeth from outside of your mouth. Furthermore, a sensitive gag reflex may be a sign of an airway problem like snoring or sleep apnea, which are both very serious health issues. If we suspect a possible airway concern, we can actually send these patients with home sleep monitor that can identify a snoring or sleep breathing disorder.

**4. Loss of Control:** Let’s face it, no one feels relaxed lying down in a dental chair while a dentist is hovering above them, in a situation where they can hardly speak or respond. This creates a lot of anxiety for some people because they don’t feel in control. This is where communication is key between the dentist and his or her patient. I always make my patients aware that they can take the necessary breaks they need, whether it is just to rest their jaw, or to go to the restroom. Giving patients the control they need to feel safe and comfortable has always been very important to me. Sometimes anti-anxiety medications can be prescribed before an appointment to help patients feel more comfortable. And on



Dentally Speaking  
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occasion, patients can choose to use nitrous oxide (laughing gas) during procedures to help alleviate anxiety.

**5. Over-all “hatred” of dental noises, smells, and sights:** All of our patients are encouraged to wear headphones during their dental procedures, in fact, we

provide our patients with iPods if they do not have their own music. Music is very effective in drowning out the sound of the drill and can help calm our anxious patients. We also diffuse essential oils in our office to help soothe our patients with aromatherapy. For our longer appointments, we provide our patients with video glasses so that they can watch a movie or some episodes of their favorite TV shows.

Dentistry has found many ways to improve the overall dental experience for patients. Hopefully, this will inspire some of you who have been avoiding the dentist to give dentistry another opportunity because things really have changed for the better.

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For more information, visit [www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com](http://www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com).