



# Dealing with Dental Anxiety

What keeps people from getting the preventive dental care they need for a healthy smile? More than 1 in 4 Americans (27%) who've bypassed care admit they were scared of going to the dentist.<sup>1</sup>

Avoiding dental care often leads to poorer oral health, pain and more costly and complex dental procedures in the future. That's why it's so important for people with dental anxiety to confront it. Here's what causes dental anxiety and how you can overcome it.

## What causes dental anxiety?

The cause(s) of dental anxiety vary from person to person, but common factors include a:

- Past negative experience at the dentist, especially during childhood
- Tendency to be anxious in general
- Concern or shame about poor oral health or hygiene
- Anxiety about paying for treatment
- Fear of possible pain
- Fear of needles
- Fear of dental drills
- Fear of gagging or choking

## How can your dentist and dental hygienist help?

If you have dental anxiety, you're not alone. Dental professionals are experienced in dealing with anxiety and work to create a relaxing environment for patients.

It's important to be open with your dentist about your concerns. Don't be afraid to ask questions to eliminate fear of the unknown. By letting your dentist and dental hygienist know ahead of time about your anxiety, you'll have the opportunity to discuss care options. Your dentist can offer suggestions to help you cope with your fear. The staff may also provide pillows, blankets, a warm neck wrap and more to help you relax. Be specific about what makes you nervous, including any previous experiences.

Perhaps you have felt pain in the past. If so, let the staff know as your dentist may suggest a larger dose of a local anesthetic to numb the area of your mouth where the procedure takes place. Your dentist may also suggest methods to relieve pain after your visit, including over-the-counter pain or prescription medication, ice or oral rinses.

Are you anxious about paying for treatment? Get an estimate for the cost and speak to your dentist about making arrangements for payment. You may also want to look into purchasing [dental insurance](#).

## What can you do to relieve anxiety?

In addition to the caring help you receive from dental professionals, you may want to try these methods to relieve your anxiety:

- Survey friends and family members to see if they recommend a dentist who is skilled at putting them at ease.
- Schedule your appointment at a time when you're under less stress, such as early morning.
- Avoid sugary foods and caffeine before your appointment, as they can trigger nervousness. Eating a high-protein meal before a procedure can help stimulate the brain chemicals that reduce anxiety.
- Bring a trusted friend or family member with you to the appointment, if visitors are allowed.
- Breathe deeply before your treatment to help slow your heart rate and relax your muscles. Try inhaling while slowly counting to five, hold for a second, then breath out slowly. Repeat five times.
- Take advantage of distractions offered at your dental office, such as television or music. Or bring your own music and headphones.
- Distract yourself with a stress ball or fidget toy.
- Agree on a signal to let your dental professional know if you need a brief pause in treatment.

You're not alone when it comes to fighting dental anxiety. Remember to communicate with your dental staff and they'll use their experience to help make you more comfortable. It's important to continue to schedule regular checkups and maintain great oral health care habits. When you avoid visiting the dentist, you can develop serious oral health care issues that will require more complicated treatment in the future.

If fear of germs keeps you from your regular dental appointment, be assured that your dental professionals care about your safety. They take numerous precautions to prevent the spread of infection, with additional measures taken due to COVID-19.

## Source

<sup>1</sup>DDPA 2020 Adult's Oral Health & Well-Being Survey.

<https://www.deltadental.com/us/en/protect-my-smile/basics/dental-anxiety/dealing-with-dental-anxiety.html>

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