



Handling dental anxiety

You're not alone if you get nervous about seeing a dentist. Anxiety is common for children and adults, but it's important that it doesn't stop you from making regular dental visits. Try the tips below to ease your anxiety.

Plan ahead. Make your appointment for a time when you're less likely to feel rushed or under pressure. Avoid caffeine and eat high-protein foods, which produce a calming effect (unlike sugary foods).¹

Speak up.² Tell your dentist and the staff about your anxiety, any bad experiences, or fears. They may have helpful tips. And your dentist might give advice like giving anti-anxiety medications, hypnosis, or nitrous oxide gas. Don't be afraid to ask questions or to request a break during treatment if you need one.

Distract yourself.² Take advantage of chairside TVs and headphones that many dentists offer in their exam rooms. Or, bring your own headphones to your appointment.

Breathe.² Deep breathing brings oxygen into your body, which slows your heart rate. Relax your muscles by tensing them for five seconds, then relaxing them for 20 seconds. Repeat as needed.

Did you know?

Between 50% to 80% of U.S. adults have some level of dental anxiety.³



Quick bites

Don't let fear keep you from seeing the dentist! Seeing a dentist regularly is good for your oral and overall health:

- The more you wait seeing a dentist, the greater your chance of developing dental problems, needing more visits and expenses in the future.
- Dentists can find more than 120 signs and symptoms of non-dental disease through a routine oral exam.⁴
- Having a good oral health routine at home can help keep your smile healthy. Brush twice a day for two minutes each time, and floss daily.



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1. Mayo Clinic, "Coping with anxiety: Can diet make a difference," web. 2. Anita M. Mark, "Coping skills for facing dental fears," The Journal of the American Dental Association 148, no. 2 (2017): 130 3. Angela M. White, Lori Giblin and Linda D. Boyd, "The Prevalence of Dental Anxiety in Dental Practice Settings," The American Dental Hygienists' Association 91, no. 1 (2017): 30-34. 4. James W. Little et al. Dental Management of the Medically Compromised Patient (St. Louis: Mosby, 2012).