

THE FEAR FACTOR

Dental Phobia

It is a fact that many people are still frightened to go to the dentist but dental phobia is the main cause of deteriorating dental health.

In this article, I shall attempt to discuss the origins of dental phobia, and to explain how you can overcome such an uncomfortable and distressing condition.

Causes of dental phobia:

1. Uncomfortable or traumatic past dental experience:

The most common cause of dental phobia; and it is thought to be the most difficult to overcome if it happened in early childhood and contributes to a deep-seated fear of dental intervention.

2. Lack of communication:

Anxious dental patients need continuous explanation and reassurance. If adequate time is not taken to explain, respond to concerns and answer questions; patients often become disillusioned, confused and unsure about the nature and outcome of treatment. Consequently, anxiety and fear increase to the extent that the patient would not return to the dentist, or visit any other dentist!

3. Invasion of personal space:

The mouth is a body cavity; it is an intimate personal space, therefore, some individuals feel extremely anxious about a very close “invasion” of such a personal space.

4. Fear of needles:

Also known as needle phobia. Individuals with needle phobia will not seek dental treatment, as they are frightened of the dental injection (or any form of injection).

5. “I let my teeth deteriorate, I am ashamed of them, I think I am going to have false teeth”:

Some patients who neglected their dental health for reasons other than fear (demanding work, caring for children, elderly or disabled family member..Etc.) believe that the dentist would be astonished and would remove all their remaining teeth and replace them with dentures. These individuals have a morbid fear of losing their own teeth and having dentures.

6. Negative or exaggerated remarks from friends or relatives who may not have had a bad experience themselves!

5 TOP TIPS TO OVERCOME THE FEAR OF DENTISTS

First, you have to realise that there are thousands of individuals like yourself; dental phobia is like any other fear; for example fear of heights or closed spaces. You are not on your own.

Second, you also have to realise that there are professionals who can help you overcome your fear. Through good communication, explanation and reassurance, your fears will tend to reduce, and you will be more in control of your anxiety.

Third, dental anxiety management techniques are now well developed and highly successful. Dental practitioners who practice anxiety management would help you overcome your fears through the administration of certain medications.

Fourth, Find an understanding and sympathetic dental practitioner. Usually you would sense the mannerism in the practice from the front desk. If the atmosphere is welcoming, relaxed and courteous, and the staff provide you with enough information and respond to your enquiries; the chances are that you are in the right place.

Fifth, let the staff and dentist know of your dental anxiety, and enquire if they practice anxiety management techniques.

Finally, I have to assure all of those who are reading this article and suffer from dental phobia, that help is available, it just takes this first step; making contact, and you may be surprised how confident and comfortable you will feel afterwards!