

RELAXATION & SEDATION

Q Is there anything that can help me with my fear of the dentist?

A Yes. Some people are so frightened of the dentist that they will not go for dental treatment. They need to overcome their fears with relaxation or sedation. Dentists today are sympathetic about these feelings, and you can ask your dentist about these ways to help.

Q How does relaxation work?

A When we are faced with a challenge or something we're afraid of, such as a visit to the dentist, our bodies produce substances which raise our anxiety. However, we can train our bodies to work against this anxiety, by learning to relax. It's not possible to be anxious and relaxed at the same time, so learning relaxation helps control our anxiety. If you are a mother, you may have learned some relaxation techniques in childbirth classes. In fact, almost anyone can learn them. You can practise at home. Some people find that meditation and yoga work well, too.

Q What about hypnosis?

A Hypnosis is a way of relaxing where you concentrate on suggestions of relaxation given by the hypnotist. It's a bit like daydreaming, although you are awake and in total control.

Q How does sedation work?

A You can be helped to feel relaxed by 'relative analgesia' sometimes known as inhalation sedation. This means breathing in a mixture of nitrous oxide and oxygen ('laughing gas') which quickly leads to a pleasant, relaxed feeling. The dentist puts you at

ease at the same time, by talking softly and suggesting what you feel. You remain conscious all the time, although you may be a little drowsy, and any treatment given causes you no discomfort.

You breathe in the mixture through a nosepiece, which is very comfortable. You can't overdose on the gas, as the mixture quickly leaves the body if you breathe in one or two breaths of ordinary air. There are no after-effects either, and you can drive a car after about 15 minutes. Many dentists use this safe and effective technique.

Q Are there any other techniques?

A Some people need something more to help them overcome their fears. The dentist can give them a sedative medicine, either in tablet or liquid form, or as an injection. You become drowsy and unaware of any treatment, but you are still able to co-operate with the dentist. The effects of sedative medicine take some time to wear off and your dentist will tell you how long the drugs will take to clear from your body. You won't be able to drink alcohol, drive or work machinery during this time.

Q How do I know which technique is right for me?

A Talk to your dentist. Most people can use relaxation techniques, but relative analgesia and sedation may not be suitable for everyone. Your dentist will tell you. You also need to tell your dentist about any medicines you may be taking, whether they're prescribed by your doctor or not.

Q How much does it cost?

A Some of the techniques are carried out under the National Health Service, but some dentists' charge privately. Talk to your dentist, and discuss the costs fully before you commit yourself to

treatment. You can have a written quotation if you'd prefer.

Q **Looking after your teeth**

A The British Dental Health Foundation (BDHF) recommends the following simple routine to help avoid dental disease.

1. Clean your teeth thoroughly every day. This means cleaning all the surfaces and it involves more than just brushing. You

need to clean between your teeth too. Your dentist or hygienist will show you the best techniques.

2. Have sugary food and drinks less often, especially between meals.

3. Use a fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride in toothpaste helps prevent tooth decay.

4. Visit your dentist regularly. Remember, use your dental team for advice to help you avoid treatment rather than waiting for the problems to happen.