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Conquer Your Fear With Sedation Dentistry (p.22)

Healthy Teeth, Beautiful Smiles, And No Pain

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Many people experience various levels of distress when considering a visit to the dentist. In many cases, this anxiety is caused by memories of a previous experience which wasn't entirely pleasant. The recollection of such stressful events often causes a prospective patient to be reluctant to schedule regular dental appointments and delay necessary treatments for problems they've encountered with their teeth, gums, and mouth. This can cause serious health issues that can extend beyond the patient's oral health. Such conditions as heart disease, diabetes, and even strokes have been linked to poor dental care.

It is critically important for the reluctant patient to know how neglecting oral health can negatively affect his or her general well-being. This knowledge can be extremely helpful when attempting to overcome negative impressions of dentists and their craft. When nervous patients are fully aware of the possible consequences of neglecting their teeth, it may be easier to take the first crucial steps to conquering their fear.

To help anyone suffering from dental fear, here are some important facts and helpful hints for overcoming your aversion to receiving dental treatment.

First, it is important for the anxious or frightened patient to know that he or she isn't alone. Many people suffer from this common problem. Between 5% and 8% of all Americans are so paralyzed by their fear that they avoid going to the dentist at all cost. They will live with pain, infection, tooth loss, and gum disease for long periods of time rather than seek treatment. Up to 20% of Americans will only go to the dentist when they have a true dental emergency because of their chronic anxiety. And it is estimated that up to 50% of Americans have some level of reluctance or distress when going to the dentist. That is a significant number, so don't worry that your dentist is unaware of these feelings. Reputable dentists are experts in the art of calming the nervous patient and are very concerned with patients' comfort levels while they are visiting their office. They want your experience to be a positive one, so that you will be able to calm your anxiety and continue to work on having a healthy mouth and a great smile throughout your life.

Today's leading dentists realize that fear keeps many people from taking the best possible care of their teeth and gums. In response to this concern, they offer the answer to this age-old problem - sedation dentistry.

When you choose sedation dentistry, your dentist will give you a pill to relax you completely. These medications are gentle sedatives that allow patients to relax by slowing the actions of their central nervous systems. Your dentist has a comprehensive and always growing list of effective sedatives to lessen pain and reduce anxiety. Since all medications are different and have a wide variety of properties and side effects, your dentist will weigh a number of factors carefully to ensure that the best match between patient and sedative is achieved.

The sedatives have several positive effects that will provide you with a pleasant dental experience. The analgesic qualities of the medications reduce any feelings of pain one may experience while their relaxing properties allow patients to feel that the hours have passed very quickly, leaving them with little or no memory of their time spent in the office. While you do not lose consciousness, your state of deep relaxation allows your dentist to perform multiple procedures at one time without the usual stress associated with a typical office visit.

Most dental treatments still require a local anesthetic injection, even when sedation dentistry techniques are used. However, this injection will be administered after you are already sedated and comfortable, so it is unlikely that you will be bothered by or remember the sensation of having the injection. Often a patient is more frightened by the thought of "getting a needle" than anything else, so this simple fact can be an enormous benefit to the anxious patient.

When choosing sedation dentistry, it is important to have someone you trust available to drive you to and from your appointment. While you will remain conscious, your ability to drive effectively will be diminished, and your safety is of paramount concern. In addition, while you are under the care of a sedation dental team, you will never be left alone. Team members will be observing you closely during your entire appointment, and will be monitoring your vital signs and behavior carefully.

Sedation dentistry is perfectly safe. Your dentist will check your medical history thoroughly to make certain that any medications you receive during your visit do not interact with any prescriptions you may currently be taking. All medications used in sedation dentistry have been thoroughly tested and have been used successfully for many years. In many cases, members of a class of sedative medications called benzodiazepines are used. Some common members of this class include diazepam, lorazepam, and triazolam. These drugs were introduced in the 1960s, so science has had many years in which to study them. In general, these drugs are extremely safe and it is uncommon for them to produce an adverse reaction with other medications. Benzodiazepines are prescribed more often than any other sedatives on the market today. These drugs are not addictive and do not have many side effects.

When choosing a dentist, make sure that he or she is specially trained in the art of sedation dentistry. Most states require additional training or certification for dentists to offer sedation dentistry in their practice, so double check your doctor's credentials.

If you have questions about the advantages of sedation dentistry, please don't hesitate to ask. Your dentist wants to make sure that each patient feels comfortable and relaxed, and they understand that knowledge is the best defense against fear. Trust your dentist to keep you informed - he or she wants to keep you smiling!

*Supremia Dentistry with **Dr. Edmond Suh** is located at 1711 S. Main Street in Wake Forest. He may be reached at 919-556-6200 or visit www.supremiadentistry.com.*