ORAL FITNESS FACT SHEET

Dental Treatment Anxiety

For many, going to the dentist's office can be a stressful experience associated with feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and even fear.

Anxiety about dental visits shows up in a number of different ways.

- Rapid heartbeat.
- Faster breathing.
- Sweaty palms.
- Feeling "keyed-up," edgy, or irritable.
- Foot tapping or fidgeting.
- Difficulty sleeping the night before a visit.
- Putting-off making an appointment.
- Not showing up for your appointment.

It's OK to have these feelings. Anxiety is a normal result of a built in survival mechanism that is meant to help keep you out of danger. Several aspects of routine dental exams and procedures can be unpleasant and slightly painful making a person feel uncomfortable. Our minds and bodies relate these unpleasant sensations with any trip to the dentist. It causes us to be more anxious than we really need to be.

Use these methods to help ease some of these feelings:

- Schedule your appointment for a time when you will not feel rushed or under pressure.
- Get a good night's sleep – if you know that you have trouble sleeping, ask your dentist for a sedative.
- Eat a high protein meal or snack before your visit.
- Avoid caffeinated or sugary beverages or foods on the day of your visit.
- Wear loose fitting, comfortable clothing.
- Distract yourself by listening to music. Bring a portable radio, tape, or CD player with headphones.
- Use relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation exercises, or closing your eyes and visualizing restful or relaxing scenes.
- Make a list of any questions that you would like to ask and bring it with you.
- Do **not** drink alcohol the night before or the day of your visit to calm you. Alcohol causes the pain-numbing medicine to not work.

Talk with your dental provider about your fears. Your dentist may prescribe a small dose of a medication to be taken just before your appointment to help manage symptoms of pain and/or worry. Patients who feel that their provider is not taking their concerns seriously should use the dental clinic chain of command to get help.

The bottom line is that anxiety associated with dental treatment is normal. Use the above simple and effective methods so worry doesn't keep you from taking care of your mouth.

USACHPPM Readiness thru Health
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