

TOOTHFULLY. *speaking*



Dr. Preety Desai

DENTAL FEAR & ANXIETY: AN AGE OLD PROBLEM

How do you cope with going to the dental office when you are scared of pain, the unknown or past experiences as a child or even ALL these factors?

Studies show that the majority of dental anxiety is seeded in childhood dental experiences when dentistry was archaic! This was my own personal history ... leading me to a career choice as seen today! The best method to deal with one's own dental demons is to search out a dentist who empathizes with you as a person and then deals with your oral health in accordance with this philosophy. If anything in your present dental office is at all uncomfortable: the smells, the decor, the cleanliness or any one member of the staff then you need to look beyond and feel like your total health need is taken care of. The dentist you have grown up with or your family has always gone to may not be the right one for you as an adult ~ seeking second opinions is common day in any field especially health care.

Once you have achieved this professional and personal comfort level with your dental office then everything will be smooth sailing - they will address any of the concerns you present or refer you to the appropriate specialist when they can't. Dentistry like medicine is more and more about having the right specialist deal with your particular issue - just like your family doctor referring you to a plastic surgeon or an orthopaedic specialist.

Studies have show when cortisol (the stress hormone) levels of children receiving dental treatment is higher and children between 4-8 years of age often cannot verbalize their fears and stresses but these carry things into adulthood. But if kids are dealt with in an empathetic manner with the support of oral/inhalation sedatives when needed then anxiety levels associated with dental treatment are tremendously diminished. This reduced fear later in life will help them as adults seek dental treatment in a timely fashion rather than facing total tooth loss due to lack of treatment from stress and fear.

Even so, as my practice is mainly adults, I hear this exact situation many times in the same week. Avoidance of treatment from fear has led to more serious and complicated situations that should never have occurred.

It is my role as a dental specialist to then outline the clinical options of treatment which then have to be delivered and executed for a patient who has fear and anxiety. What are the options then? As mentioned sedative techniques and options are available to younger children but also adults. There is no need to be a martyr! Options for sedations are three fold: oral sedation (like a short acting valium type drug) alone or in combination with inhalation (nitrous oxide ie laughing gas) is THE safest option available to iv sedation in the dental office to general anaesthetic in the operating room.

Risk factors of all the above vary but the iv sedation and general anaesthetic control your breathing in various stages and thus can have slighter higher risk values while there has never been any cases documented with oral or inhalation sedation.

So remember that dental care is just one part of your overall well being. Make sure it is not the fear of the unknown or just fear itself that is preventing you - Dentistry today is a sophisticated and precisely delivered art and sedation can always help you over the first few humps of your goal to self care.



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