



Brush Up on Oral Health

Reducing Fear of Dental Visits

Some people are afraid of dental visits and avoid them. Parents who are fearful may avoid taking their children to dental visits. This can be a big problem, especially if the parent or child has an oral disease, such as tooth decay or gum disease. Oral diseases do not go away without treatment and get worse without proper care.

This Brush Up on Oral Health tip sheet describes reasons some parents may fear dental visits and avoid seeking care. It includes tips on ways parents can overcome their fears.



Common Reasons Parents Fear Dental Visits

Understanding why parents fear dental visits is important for helping them address their fear. People may feel a natural urge to protect their mouth and may be uneasy with someone working in their mouth. Also, being tipped back or lying down in a dental chair may make people feel helpless. Other common reasons include bad childhood memories of dental visits, concern that treatment may be painful, fear of sharp dental instruments, and fear of strange noises and smells in the dental office.

Tips for Helping Parents Get Over Fear of Dental Visits

- **Admit there is a problem.** Many people make excuses about why they avoid dental visits. Often, they say they do not like their dentist, are too busy, or cannot afford oral health care. Helping parents be truthful about their fear of dental visits can be the first step toward overcoming it.
- **Find the right dental team.** Encourage parents to ask family members and friends who were afraid of dental visits to recommend a dental team that has helped them overcome their fear. Help parents find a dental office or clinic that knows how to reduce anxiety about dental visits.



- **Bring someone along.** Recommend that parents bring a trusted family member or friend who is not afraid of dental visits to sit with them during their appointment.
- **Talk with the dental team.** Urge parents to talk to the dental team about their fears. The dental team can help make parents feel comfortable and ease their fears.
- **Ask the dental team for explanations.** Explain to parents that they can ask the dental team to describe things to them in advance. Parents can also ask the dental team to let the parent know what they are doing along the way as well as what to expect next. Parents can offer the dental team suggestions about ways to make the visit more comfortable for the parent.
- **Make a plan to communicate during care.** Encourage parents to talk to the dental team before treatment begins and agree on a signal that shows that the parent is uncomfortable or needs a break.
- **Block out noise.** Parents can wear earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones to block sounds from the dental equipment and instruments. Parents can use earbuds to listen to music on their phone or other device to take their mind off the dental procedure.
- **Use relaxation techniques.** Work with parents to practice and use deep breathing, muscle relaxation, or meditation during their visit. Encourage them to relax their mind and imagine a peaceful place.
- **Consider options for comfort.** Help parents schedule visits at a time when they are not stressed or rushed. Parents can bring nasal strips if they are worried that they will have trouble breathing. They can also ask to have numbing cream put on their gums before getting a shot. Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) or other options can also be used to reduce stress. If parents find that the position of the dental chair is uncomfortable, encourage them to ask the dental team to adjust it.

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