Dentist Secrets to an Anxiety-Free & Pain-Free Visit Transcript

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Dental Anxiety and Common Fears

A lot of people worry about dentistry because of their fear of pain. When I first started out in dentistry, one of my goals was to counteract or reverse every negative thing that people could find about a dental office.

And I was surprised at how many there were. People were worried about the pain. They were worried about kind of the invasive feeling of somebody this close and in your mouth.

They didn't like the smells. They didn't like that the chairs were uncomfortable. They didn't like that we talked to them while their mouth was full of things.

They didn't like that their hair and makeup was all messed up when they got done. So many things that people don't love about the dentist. In fact, people told me that they would rather have a baby than go to the dental office.

Well, I've had a baby and if we are worse than that, I am so sorry. So I want to talk through a few things that you can do at home to help make this a good experience, but also what you should be looking for in a dental provider so it can be a good experience.

Now, the elephant in the room is that if you have dental treatment needs, you're going to have to go to a dentist. And some of the things that go along with that dental visit really can't be avoided.

Things like getting numb, things like we're in your mouth and there's a lot of water, a lot of these different things.

Making Injections More Comfortable

So let's talk through really what's necessary, what's not, what's safe, what's not. because my goal is to make sure that we are providing care in a way that is the best for your body, the most biocompatible, and really the best experience for you.

So let's talk about that dreaded shot. Well, first of all, there's a couple of things you can do. We can use something called topical anesthetic. What this does is it numbs the spot locally.

It just numbs the gum in the area where you might get a shot. That topical anesthetic does work pretty well. Another thing that you can look for is a practitioner that has a couple of other skills.

Now, dentists hopefully are watching this as well. A few things that can be done, they might shake your lip. Why? What is that doing? Well, what that's doing is it's actually distracting the brain.

It's called the gait theory, that if we can get your brain thinking about something else, you don't think about that. It was really interesting. Just recently, I went and I had a couple of spots biopsied, one on my head, one on my face, biopsied.

And it was fascinating to me because they had to numb the area to be able to, you know, scrape away a chunk of my head. And before they did it, they used this little vibrating thing.

It was kind of like a little, just a vibrator razor that would go on my head like this and it vibrated it. And then they gave the anesthetic and I said, oh, the gait theory.

And the doctor looked at me like, who are you weirdo? I'm like, you know, I know about the gate theory, I'm a dentist, but it works. So ask the dentist, say, hey, will you shake my lip a little bit when you're giving that?

Because it distracts your brain. You don't know that it's happening. Another thing that you can do is right when they're going to give the injection, you take a deep breath in and then you let it out.

during the injection itself. Why? The brain is again thinking about the muscles contracting to breathe out. It's very fascinating, but it works.

Why Sedation Can Help During Treatment

So these are some of the things that you can ask for, but also that you can do yourself. Now, during the procedure itself, there are some things that can make it very uncomfortable.

Like what if you are very gaggy? You have a very strong gag reflex. Honestly, in that situation or if you have a lot of dentistry that needs to be performed at one time, I recommend dental sedation.

And you might think, really? I wouldn't think you would do that being a health-based dentist. Let me talk to you about this. When you are laying in the chair and your body is getting more and more anxious and you're worried and every single thing that you hear and feel and taste, you're wondering, what was that?

What was that? What you're doing is you're using up all of your fight or flight hormones. This is cortisol, adrenaline, all of those things. You're depleting all of it.

And you're putting your body into a very fight or flight mode. Well, when you are in that fight or flight mode, the things that don't happen are thinking objectively, digestion, recovery, healing.

None of those things can happen when you're in that heightened anxiety place. Your body doesn't respond well. Oftentimes, the anesthetic doesn't work very well because your body's kind of resisting it and rejecting it.

So even the normal numbing doesn't take or work as long as it should because your body's pushing it out with this fight or flight reaction. Or you go home and you just feel tired.

terrible. Your body is so drained from the procedure that it doesn't have the energy it needs to heal. So I actually strongly recommend IV sedation. Again, you might think that you're surprised that I'm saying this, but it's true because when we do IV sedation, it's a very light sedation.

I tell people it's similar to what you would have when you're doing a colonoscopy. It's kind of on off, you know, it's on you're sleepy. It's off and you're awake.

What this allows your body to do is not respond to the sounds, the stretches, the tastes, all of the things that have this heightened anxiety going on in your system.

So your body is truly able to relax. to get into that deep what's called parasympathetic action, which is the rest, refresh, heal. So it's not using up all of those hormones during the procedure.

So you go home, now your body still has what it needs to heal and to recover. If you have a long procedure, you have a lot to do, or you're working on both sides of the mouth at one time, I recommend that you do IV sedation.

Managing Gag Reflex and Laughing Gas

Now what about laughing gas? Laughing gas is actually great if you're just doing a little bit, and laughing gas is very helpful if you're gaggy. So if you have a really strong gag reflex, laughing gas or the old school chloreceptic.

Literally, chloroceptic or warm water. Warm water actually turns off the gag reflex as well. So if you are really struggling in the dental office, say, you know, can I just get a rinse of warm water?

I'm just going to rinse back there. It'll turn off that gag reflex or bring some chloroceptic along with you. Do a little

squirt squirt back there. Tastes a little gross, but it numbs the back of the palate.

The gagging goes away and it just kind of takes the edge off the procedure. One caveat If you have been shown to have something called an MTHFR genetic variant, you will not respond well to the laughing gas.

You will feel terrible after. So that is one situation that I don't recommend using the laughing gas for if you have that genetic variant. So all of these things are to help in making really the necessary needed treatment more comfortable, something that maybe you're not dreading quite so much.

So talk to your dentist. really engage them in a conversation. Say, how can you help me? I'm really nervous. What things do you have for people like me?

Sometimes it's just a warm blanket. You know, sometimes it's just somebody there holding your hand. Little things like that can help with that experience.

If you have dentistry that needs to be done, don't put it off because of fear.

Choosing Comfort Measures and Not Delaying Care

There are ways to get this done. that are comfortable, that you don't really have any memory of after, and that your body can recover quickly from. Make sure that you're taking care of yourself when you get your dental work done so your body can completely head to toe be well.

We know how important dental health is to overall wellness. You don't want to put it off. It will contribute to chronic disease situations and other issues you don't want.

But there are ways to make it so it's possible, less stressful, and easier on your system. Because when your mouth's well, you can be well.