



## **Are you afraid to go to the dentist?**

One of the main reasons people do not visit their dentist on a regular basis isn't lack of finances, lack of time, or lack of need. It is a fear of dentists that keep people from visiting dental offices nationwide. Some people have had bad experiences in the past, and just the thought of opening their mouths in the bright light of a dental chair puts them on edge. Today there is no reason to fear. There are many ways to ease patient anxiety, and new improvements in dentistry have really increased patient comfort.

Dental practice philosophies are different now than when many of us grew up. Today, anesthetic is used routinely and there is no need to feel the pain of cleaning out a cavity. Anesthetic techniques have improved: we know much more about the nerve patterns of teeth and surrounding structures making it easier to numb a patient, and new anesthetics are available for the particularly "difficult to numb" patient. Also, preventative dentistry is the key in today's world. If a cavity can be prevented or discovered when it is small, there is less trauma to the teeth overall. A diagnodent laser can be used to detect small cavities inside teeth that are difficult to see clinically. In addition, root canal treatment has improved significantly in the past few years. And for the patient that has been traumatized in the past and has a long-standing fear, sedatives may be used to ease anxiety.

There are things you can do to ease your fears during an appointment. Feel free to discuss your fears with your dentist or hygienist. Most will give fearful patients the extra attention they need. Have the dentist walk through the procedure with you so you know what to expect. If the noises bother you, bring a headset with soothing music. Work out a signal to use with your dentist if you feel uncomfortable during the procedure so he or she can stop and give you a break. And most importantly keep your regularly scheduled visits so problems can be identified while they are small, well before something hurts or is uncomfortable.

A person should be totally comfortable discussing these issues with his or her dentist. Many patients have a fear, and most dental professionals understand this issue and are able to work with the patient. If you feel like your dentist isn't sensitive to your feelings, discuss it openly with him or her. If your dentist knows and understands your anxiety, he or she can help you work through it. But don't let your fear keep you from taking proper care of your mouth. Remember, it is less frightening to address a small issue than a larger one down the road!