6 Tips to Help You Cope With Dental Phobia

by AMY WATSON

What Is Dental Phobia?

Around the world, there are millions of people who are afraid to go to the dentist. Some of this fear stems from one bad experience or the sheer idea of a dentist with sharp tools. Although dental phobia is associated with children, it does not discriminate based on age. There are many adults who avoid the dentist altogether due to this irrational phobia. Fortunately, it can be controlled. Here are some tips for overcoming your dental phobia.

What Is Dental Phobia?

Dental phobia is a term that summarizes when people feel afraid to go to the dentist. Their fright usually makes them miss dental treatment. A person with dental phobia may experience sweating, a racing heartrate and distress.

Proper dental hygiene is important, so we have created some tips to help you overcome your anxiety.

1. Take Someone You Trust to the First Appointment

For many people, the anxiety and stress surrounding dental phobia usually culminate at the first meeting with their dentist. Instead of heading into this potentially emotional event alone, it's best to bring someone who you trust so you are not alone. A family member or close friend can help you feel more confident, safe and relaxed. Depending on the dentist, your plus-one might even be able to sit in the room with you during the procedure.

2. Find a Dentist You Like

While the fear that is characterized by dental phobia is largely irrational, that is not to say that poor dentists do not exist. Whether you feel that your dentist is too mean, rough, or short, you can always switch to a dentist that you feel more comfortable with. Finding a professional that you trust and actually like can really help with reducing the anxiety you feel in the dentist's chair. Just be sure you are not using this as an excuse to not confront your fears directly and make a good life choice.

3. Talk to a Therapist

Dentophobia is not just a fancy name for a common fear. It's actually a diagnosable mental health condition that prevents many people from living a healthy and fulfilling life. If you truly cannot bring yourself to go to the dentist, it might be a good idea to see a psychologist or psychiatrist beforehand to tackle the root cause of the problem. These professionals can help assess your fears, make a potential diagnosis and recommend certain treatments. Although this is an option for severe cases, it can help tackle the problem at the base.

4. Use Relaxation Techniques

When you are in the chair getting ready for your check-up or procedure and the nerves start to kick in, try some relaxation techniques to calm yourself down. You can try controlled breathing where you focus on your breath, in and out. This is actually a form of meditation that can help keep your mind from latching on to dental-related fears. If that does not do the trick, you could also try a muscle relaxation technique where you tense and release various muscles, just be sure to not interrupt the dentist.

5. Ask Questions

Many people fear dentists and dental procedures because of the mystery surrounding this profession. While a patient sits in a dentist's chair with their mouth open, they are not entirely sure what is going on. The technical jargon does not do much in the way of clarifying this uncertainty. Asking your dentist questions about your procedure is a great way to clear up this confusion and gain a better understanding of what you are getting yourself into.

6. Take It one Step at a Time

When thinking about a dentist appointment overall, it can seem like a daunting event for someone who has reservations. Instead of letting this event loom over you, consider breaking it down into smaller steps. This is a great way to take the anxiety out of the appointment. Instead of focusing on everything at once, you simply shift your attention to the next task. First, you walk into the office. Next, you wait for your name to be called. Then, you enter into the dentist's room, and so on. When you split the appointment up into these smaller chunks, it may not be so scary.

Dealing With Dental Phobia

Dental phobia does not have to be something you struggle with forever. Whether you are in your early 20s or are in retirement, find solace in the fact that you are not alone. There are countless people struggling with this fear. There are many ways to overcome this stress and anxiety, and each person will find their success by taking a different path. It's always a good idea to speak with a professional to see how you can start tackling this issue head on.