

## **AFRAID OF THE DENTIST?** *...how to manage your fear and get the care you need and deserve in a safe, comfortable environment*



Napoleon, OH— Have you ever thought or said the following statements regarding a visit to the dentist? “It took me days to build up the courage even to walk through your door.” “Can you fix this without using a needle; I hate needles.” “Doctor, I cannot stand the noise of the drill.” And my favorite statement I hear too often: “I’d rather have a baby than have dental work done.” Even with the modern advancements in dentistry today, some people are too afraid to pick up the phone to call a dental office. An estimated 145 million Americans avoid dental services because of a fear of pain or other dental phobias. Delaying needed dental care can lead to serious health problems—even death—if a dental infection goes untreated for too long. So how can this incredible but real fear be overcome?

Mildly anxious people can overcome uncomfortable thoughts of going to the dentist with simple techniques. Early morning appointments are best so anxiety does not build up throughout the day. Taking a low dose of the medication Valium at bedtime, combined with an early morning appointment can be even more successful. A CD player or iPod and headphones help to drown out unpleasant noises and create a wonderful diversion. The use of nitrous oxide, also known as laughing gas, is wonderful for people with fear of dental needles and getting numb. Laughing gas is colorless, sweet-smelling, and non-irritating. There is no “hang-over” effect and you can drive home safely without an escort. Topical anesthetic and computer-aided anesthetic delivery devices can

help make injections almost unnoticeable. Find a dentist that offers such calming amenities.

For more severe dental phobics, perhaps the hardest step is calling a dental office. A dental office that treats high-fear patients is very compassionate on the phone and listens to your fears about receiving dental care. A consultation appointment should be set up to meet the doctor and staff in a safe, non-threatening environment. An extensive health and dental history is taken. X-rays and stone models are obtained if you are agreeable. After the dentist outlines a plan for your dental treatment and finances are arranged, you can choose either oral or IV sedation. Both of these methods require a companion to bring you to and from the dental office. Oral sedation, also known as oral anxiolysis, is achieved by taking a prescribed anti-anxiety medication one hour before your dental appointment. The medication is administered in the office by a properly trained dentist. You should also be given a medication to take the night before that helps you get a good night's sleep. No food or drink intake should occur after midnight except for water. A great benefit of the anti-anxiety medication is the amnesic effect, which causes you to have no memory of an otherwise unpleasant dental experience. While in the dental office, your vital signs are constantly monitored for your safety. After your dental treatment is completed, you will be taken home by your companion and he or she will stay with you until you have completely recovered from the effects of the sedation medication. The next day you will have very little discomfort or memory of the visit.

IV sedation is another great option for the high-fear patient. This is a much deeper level of sedation. You may feel more "out of it" or sleepier than with oral sedation. The level of sedation can be controlled more easily as well. It can only be administered by a dentist with extensive training and a license to provide IV sedation. It is excellent for both short appointments and extensive dental treatment that may take 6-8 hours to complete. Some dental offices work with a dental anesthesiologist to handle IV sedations, leaving the doctor free to do the needed dental care in a focused manner. Like with oral sedation, a companion will bring you to the appointment and take you home, staying with you until you have completely recovered.

Now that you know getting the dental care you need does not have to hurt or be scary, pick up the phone and find a dental office that is the right fit for you. Putting off needed dental care is dangerous to your body and mind. Remember, you deserve to be listened to and treated with respect in regards to your fear. For more information and to find a dentist with sedation training, visit the website [www.sedationcare.com](http://www.sedationcare.com).

*Michael D. Carpenter, DDS, is a general dentist with a focus on sedation, implants, TMD/TMJ, and comprehensive dentistry practicing in Napoleon, Ohio. He is an LVI Fellow and a member of the Dental Organization for Conscious Sedation (D.O.C.S.), the International Association of Comprehensive Aesthetics (IACA), American Dental Association (ADA), Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), Ohio Dental Association (ODA), International Congress of Oral Implantologists (ICOI), and Maumee Valley Dental Society. He may be contacted through his website at [www.TheNapoleonDentist.com](http://www.TheNapoleonDentist.com).*