



British
Dental Health
Foundation

The British Dental Health Foundation is an independent, UK-based charity dedicated to promoting the benefits of good oral health to the public throughout the world.

The Foundation promotes three key messages:

- brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- cut down on how often you have sugary foods and drinks.
- visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.

Look for our 'Approved' symbol on oral health products. You can trust these products to live up to the claims on their packaging.



The Dental Helpline is the Foundation's own confidential advice service. Qualified dental professionals are available to answer your questions personally from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Or you can send us a question by email from our website at any time.

 **Dental
Helpline**
0845 0631188
www.dentalhelpline.org.uk

It costs the Foundation £5 for every enquiry we answer. If you would like to make a donation, please send a cheque to the address below, or phone 01788 539793 to donate by credit or debit card.

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www.dentalhealth.org

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Tell me about

My fear of the dentist





Q Why am I afraid of the dentist?

A Being 'afraid of the dentist' may mean different things to different people. It will probably help if you work out just what it is that worries you most.

Maybe the sounds and smells bring back memories of bad experiences as a child, or the thought that having treatment will hurt.

The good news is that more and more dentists now understand their patients' fears, and with a combination of kindness and gentleness can do a great deal to make dental treatment an acceptable, normal part of life.

Q I have been scared of the dentist for a while – what is it like now?

A Dental techniques have improved so much over the last few years, that modern dental treatment can now be completely painless. Despite this, most people still feel a little nervous at the thought of going to the dentist.

If you have not been to see a dentist for some time, you will probably find that things have improved a lot since your last visit. The general attitude is likely to be more relaxed, the dental techniques and safety procedures will be much better, and the equipment will be more up to date.

Q How do I choose a dentist?

A Many dentists today offer some form of treatment for nervous patients. The first fear to deal with is the fear of admitting to other people that you are afraid of dental treatment. If you can discuss it with your friends or colleagues you are likely to find someone else who has similar problems, and

who may be able to recommend a dentist to you. A dentist who is personally recommended by another nervous person is usually a very good choice.

Q Do some practices specialise in treating nervous patients?

A Yes. This means that they should be used to dealing with nervous patients regularly.

As someone who is nervous about dental treatment, you need to be looked after by a dental practice that will take special care of you. You may need to travel some distance, but it will be worth the effort when you are no longer afraid.

Q I haven't been to the dentist in a long time – will I need a lot of treatment?

A Years ago it was normal for people to need fillings every time they went to their dentist, but things have changed for the better now. With the help of your dentist and hygienist, the aim now is for healthy teeth and mouths that stay healthy. Using a fluoride toothpaste will help to strengthen your teeth and prevent decay. Therefore, you may be surprised at how little treatment you need.

Teeth are for life and can last a lifetime if they are looked after properly. If you can get your mouth into good shape, with the help of the dentist and dental hygienist, you should need less treatment and there will be less for the dentist to do in the future.

It is important to keep up your regular visits to the dentist, not only to monitor tooth decay, but also to help prevent gum disease.

Once your mouth is healthy, your visits to the practice will often just be easy sessions for checking and cleaning.



How do I start?



It may be helpful for you to see the practice before you arrange an appointment. Call in to speak to the receptionist, and see what the atmosphere is like. Do the other people there look cheerful and happy? Does it give you a feeling of confidence? Perhaps you could meet the dentist and have a look around the practice as a visitor.



What will happen at the first appointment?



Your first appointment should just be for a consultation. See it as an opportunity for you to 'interview' the dentist, receptionist and dental nurse, and have a chat about what to expect next.



Should I tell the dental team that I am nervous?



Make sure that the practice knows you are nervous, so that they can help you.

Tell your dentist what it is that you particularly dislike about dental treatment. If you think you know the reason, tell your dentist what may have caused your fear.



I am afraid of injections – what can I do?



Many people are scared of the local anaesthetic injection needed to numb the tooth. Again, be sure to tell the dentist that this is something that bothers you. There are anaesthetic gels that can be applied to the area of the gum to be injected. This gel numbs the gum so that you cannot feel the needle.



What is the best time of day to visit the dentist?



Book appointments at a time of day when you feel at your best, and when you do not have any other commitments to worry about. Allow plenty of time so that you can get to the practice in a relaxed frame of mind – arriving in a rush will only make you feel more nervous. It is usually best to have something to eat before you go, so there is no chance of you feeling faint while you are in the chair.



Can I take a friend with me?



People often feel better if a friend comes with them to the practice. Think about what would suit you best. A reassuring and capable friend is often a great help.



Can I take anything with me?



Listening to music is also a good way to help you relax. Some practices have it playing in the treatment rooms, but the best way is to take a personal stereo so that you can have your own choice of music.



I have gone for a check-up, what do I do next?



Take things one step at a time. Discuss any proposed treatment with your dentist, and decide what you feel you can cope with. This may be no more than an examination with a dental mirror first. If you succeed with that, you may feel you could have your teeth polished next, possibly by a dental hygienist. Don't be afraid to say when you have had enough - there is usually no reason to hurry through the dental treatment.



Q What else can I do to help me relax during treatment?

A Thinking hard about something other than the treatment is a good distraction. Try to solve a puzzle in your mind, or perhaps work out a plan for each day of next year's holiday. Or give yourself something tricky to do - try to wiggle each toe in turn, without moving any of the others.

Q Can I ask the dentist to stop if I need to?

A Agree with your dentist a sign that means 'stop now - I need a break' before the treatment is started. Usually you can just raise your hand, and the treatment can be stopped for a few minutes until you are ready to start again. Once you know that you can control the situation you will feel more confident.

Q What other techniques are available to help?

A There are various methods available, and it will depend which methods the practice is experienced with and which you feel would help you most. Relaxation techniques can often be learned from specialist teachers or at home and can be very useful in controlling anxiety. (See our leaflet 'Tell Me About Relaxation & Sedation')

Many practices offer several types of sedation, including inhalation ('gas and air') and intravenous (by injection).

Other practices offer hypnosis and relaxation techniques. You would learn these techniques, which would allow you to gain control over your feelings of distress or fear.

Counselling is another way of dealing with feelings of anxiety. This is usually carried out by a member of the practice team, in a room away from the surgery. You would be encouraged to discuss your fears so that they may be dealt with and overcome.

Q Can I go to sleep for treatment?

A General anaesthetics are now only rarely available for routine treatment. If a general anaesthetic is needed, patients are referred to a hospital where the necessary safety equipment is available.

Q Will things get better with time?

A As you get to know and trust your dentist, hygienist and other members of the practice you will find your fears begin to lessen. In time you will gain control over your fears, and dental care can become a normal part of your life.

Q What will it cost me?

A There may be an extra charge for some sedation and relaxation techniques on top of the normal cost of treatment. It is always recommended that you get a written estimate before starting treatment.

Q Who can I talk to?

A There are many organisations that help people suffering from phobias. Most of them also offer help to people nervous of the dentist because it is a very common problem. Contact the British Dental Health Foundation's Dental Helpline on 0845 063 1188 to discuss your fears and find out about other organisations to contact.