

Don't Fear Thy Dentist

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*Some pains are physical,
And some pains are mental,
But the one that's both is
dental!*

These lines truly describe the anxieties of a person suffering from dental phobia – the fear of dental care.

Dental phobia, also known as dental anxiety, dentophobia and odontophobia, is prevalent not just among children but many adults suffer from this phobia too. Dental phobia should not be termed just as an anxiety disorder; if not treated it may have serious implications on your health.

- ◆ People having dental phobia are reluctant to see a dentist.
- ◆ Most people admit that they are unable to sleep before a visit to dental clinic or the very thought gives them giddiness.
- ◆ Many people suffering from dental phobia know that their anxieties are irrational but are unable to get over it.

Reasons

- ◆ **Traumatic experience** during childhood days may lead to dental phobia.
- ◆ **Fear of pain.** People dread the dental pain. Dental tools used for treatments including drilling and root canal treatment invoke anxiety among patients.
- ◆ **Fear of anaesthesia.** Many are worried about being numb when a dentist works on their teeth, while some fear that anaesthetic effect



may wear off during the treatment and they will have to bear more pain.

- ◆ **Embarrassment.** Most often dental ailments arise due to unhygienic practices. People are aware of this and hence reluctant to meet a dentist.
- ◆ And finally, the **dentists** themselves! If the dentist is perceived as uncaring and rude, most people tend to discontinue their visits to dental clinics.

Delaying or totally discontinuing dental visits will have larger impacts on attitudes to oral health and self-care. Such patients may prolong their dental visits to an extent, wherein they are unable to bear the pain or are in a dental emergency. These visits are subsequently bound to be lengthy and painful ordeals, hence reinforcing their dental phobia.

How to cope with dental phobia

- ◆ Talk to your dentist - tell him or her about your anxiety and fear. If you are comfortable in sharing your worries, you will have better confidence in them and may not feel

uncomfortable during the treatment.

- ◆ Discuss with your dentist about each step involved. If you are unable to bear the pain, immediately ask the dentist to stop.
- ◆ Understand that not all dental treatments are painful.
- ◆ Distraction strategy: Distract yourself during dental examination or treatment. For example, playing mental games or counting numbers.
- ◆ Follow good oral hygiene practices.
- ◆ Go for regular check-ups.
- ◆ Don't delay a visit to the dentist. It only helps in aggravating the situation.
- ◆ In extreme cases, pathologic anxiety or phobia may require psychiatric consultation and intervention, which will offer education and behavioural therapy. The principle of any behavioural therapy is that you have to face the fear in order to overcome it.

According to author Dale Carnegie: *Fear doesn't exist anywhere except in the mind.* Remember that phobia is a learned behaviour that can be unlearned.