

Dental Care

Avoiding The White Knuckle Dental Experience

Are you one of the people who break into a cold sweat at the thought of your upcoming dental appointment? It is very common for people to "die a thousand deaths" in anticipation of something that may or may not even happen. This is particularly true of the anticipated "dental visit." This may have resulted from early negative experiences as a child, stories told to us by our parents or friends, or other life experiences where we fearfully anticipated the unknown. To make it worse, the dental environment in years past has been associated with discomfort, unusual smells, bright lights, unsettling sounds, looming tubes and pulleys, and, of course, those foreboding shiny, sharp looking instruments in clear view. And, it is just plain scary to lean back and turn over control to someone we may not know well and haven't yet developed a level of trust with.

Fortunately, modern dentistry has come a long way in allaying the fears associated with the old dental stereotypes. Thanks to newer technology, a positive dental experience is possible and should be the norm. I advise patients that most of us would definitely prefer sitting by a pool sipping a Mai Tai as apposed to sitting prone with one's mouth propped open for extended periods of time with less than enjoyable sound effects. However, the dental experience can be made comfortable, tolerable, and for many even relatively pleasant.

So what is the secret to a positive dental experience? The first step is being welcomed into a comfortable and caring environment and allaying the unknown. There is nothing more important than a warm welcoming staff and dentist with not only excellent clinical skills, but also good chair-side manner and communication skills. Empathy and careful listening

go a long way in establishing trust, and trust reduces fear and anxiety.

The second step is a full understanding what each upcoming dental appointment will entail. What procedures are to be done, how long will it take, what will I experience during the appointment, and what is to be expected following the appointment? Fear is allayed when one knows what to expect, and is accomplished by good explanations in a non-rushed

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environment. Each positive dental experience builds on the former, and more confidence is realized.

The third step is learning what each person can do for themselves at home prior to the dental appointment. Longer appointments are better tolerated in the morning. A good night's rest and a sound breakfast with minimal sugar and preferably no coffee will minimize anxiety and make the dental anesthetics work much better. Many offices will also provide a nutritional drink to keep blood sugar levels stable for longer appointments. It is better to avoid eating or hot drinks until the numbness wears off.

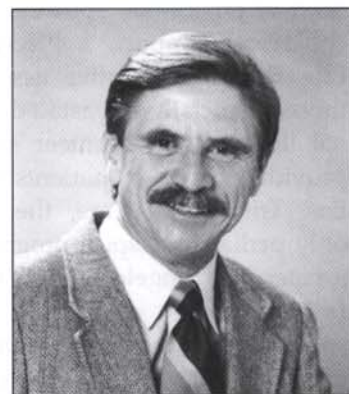
The final step involves utilizing the many comfort items and distractions provided by many modern offices. Pillows for the back of the head and under the knees reduce pos-

tural stress build-up, blankets reduce heat loss that increase body tension, and colored glasses not only protect the eyes but have relaxing qualities for the central nervous system. The use of headphones with your favorite music is fantastic for distraction and relaxation and makes time go much quicker. In some instances it is also possible to have visual distractions through TV monitors using short movies or news broadcasts.

Paying attention to the above considerations will go a long way toward promoting a positive dental experience in the future and avoiding the white-knuckle syndrome.

Dr. Jerry Bottomley of Rolling Hills Dental received his undergraduate training at UCLA, his dental degree from UC San Francisco Medical Center. He has been in private practice in Rolling Hills Estates since 1971 and is dedicated to providing life long dental health. He practices with his partners Drs. Norton Donner and Jeff Goodman using state of the art equipment and procedures, with emphasis on cosmetic and implant dentistry.

To learn more about Rolling Hills Dental, please call 377-0966 or visit them on the web at www.rhdental.com. The office is located at 857 Silver Spur Road in front of Bristol Farms.



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