

## SUMMER 1997 EDITION – DR. DOI'S TALKING STORY

### DENTAL FEAR AFFECTS MILLIONS

About 12 million Americans have dental phobias...so terrified of dental treatment they avoid it entirely. One out of four, about thirty five million people, suffer from dental anxiety. Fear is a natural and normal reaction we have to protect ourselves and to avoid injury. Fear is learned. And the good news is that it can be unlearned.

The association of fear with dentistry develops out of socialization and personal learning experiences. Modern dental techniques and equipment have virtually eliminated any pain associated with dental treatment. Dentist often provide medications to assure patient comfort during dental procedures. In addition to chemical agents, dentists are borrowing techniques from clinical and behavioral psychologists. Several of these techniques appear quite promising, such as distraction, relaxation and imagery to help patients overcome their fear. It is gratifying to assist a person's change from being "white knuckled" in fear of dentistry to being so relaxed that they can (and sometimes do) drift off to sleep during a treatment appointment. Dental fears and anxiety can be neutralized.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- *Talk About It*  
If you are anxious or fearful about dental treatment, the best advice is to talk to your dentist. Talking about fear is often the first step in overcoming it.
- *Establish A "Signal"*  
Discuss with your dentist a signal, such as raising your hand, to make a pause in treatment. This will establish your sense of control.
- *Breathe*  
Keep breathing. Oxygen is important to life. When we are fearful, we have a tendency to hold our breath. Lack of oxygen increases anxiety. Fear can be markedly reduced by establishing a regular breathing pattern.
- *Avoid Caffeine*  
Coffee, tea, cola drinks and cocoa have the stimulant caffeine in them. They make you more jittery and agitated. Discontinue consumption six hours prior to your dental appointment.
- *Temperature*  
Because of the air conditioning in the office, you may want to bring something warm to wear.
- *Sound*  
If you are concerned about noise, bring ear plugs or your favorite music and player, if you have one.
- *Hands Over Abdomen*  
When seated in the dental chair, fold your hands over your abdomen. It is reassuring to cover your solar plexus area.

- **Eat Protein**  
Forty to sixty minutes prior to your appointment eat some protein foods. This will reduce the agitation and irritability associated with hunger.
- **Deprogramming Fear**  
Using a procedure called neurolinguistic programming (NLP), the dentist or psychologist can help you neutralize your fears. NLP is a fast and effective treatment for phobias.
- **Miscellaneous**  
Go to the bathroom, kick off your shoes, wear comfortable clothing, do whatever it takes to be comfortable.

## **REPORTING CHANGES BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT MAY INSURE MORE EFFICIENT SERVICE**

- A change in your health could affect the way we treat you.
- New medications may require us to either stop medication before treatment or modify how we treat you.
- A change in your insurance may affect the cost of the procedure to you.
- A new address or phone number may prevent us from reminding you of the appointment time or changes.
- If there is something you want the doctor to check, we may need more time. If it sounds urgent, we will try to bring you in sooner.
- If you have questions about why a procedure is to be done, materials, costs, and risks - we want to know these and answer them before your next appointment.