

## Overcoming dental anxiety

# Avoiding the dentist now may mean spending more time in the dental chair later.

*According to the Academy for General Dentistry, up to 40 million Americans don't go to the dentist as often as they should because of fear and anxiety.<sup>1</sup> However, you may spend more time in the dental chair if problems that could have been prevented reach a stage where treatment is the only option.<sup>1</sup>*

While dental anxiety can be deep-rooted, you and your dentist have the tools to make each visit a positive experience.

### What your dentist does<sup>1</sup> – before and after you step into the office

- Trains front office staff to answer questions and help you understand what to expect during your visit.
- Provides a clean, comfortable waiting room with magazines and oral health resources, with perhaps music or television, or a play area for children.
- Implements the latest procedures to help eliminate or minimize discomfort. Offers pain control medications, local anesthesia, sedation, as procedures and patient history suggest.\*
- Keeps you informed and in control throughout the visit.
- Tries to put you at ease, possibly offering you or your child on a tour of the office and explaining the equipment. The dentist may also allow an adult to remain with a child under three throughout the visit.

### What you can do<sup>1</sup> – knowledge is the greatest defense against anxiety

- Avoid caffeine and sugary foods before your visit. Choose high-protein foods instead, as they help produce a calming effect and make you less anxious.
- Ask your dentist questions about your oral health, your treatment, and your concerns. Discuss any specific fears openly with your dentist.
- Throughout the procedure, focus on breathing slowly and regularly; decreased oxygen levels can further increase feelings of panic.
- Use hand signals any time you're uncomfortable during a procedure.
- Maintain a schedule of regular preventive visits so the dentist can detect oral health problems early before treatment becomes necessary.



### Common "Dental Fear Factors"

While people are anxious about going to the dentist for different reasons, comments from family and friends or memories of a bad dental experience more than 10 years in the past are the top sources of anxiety – according to an on-line poll by the American Academy of Periodontology.<sup>2</sup> Other fear factors can include:<sup>1</sup>

- Feeling like the dentist is rushed or is neglecting your concerns
- Anxiety about the effectiveness of local anesthetic
- Anticipation of pain
- Costs of recommended procedures
- Sterile smell of the dentist's office
- Interrupting the normal day's routine
- For children, the first visit is a journey into the unknown

**Schedule your next dental appointment today.**



\* Please refer to your plan documents for information on covered procedures. <sup>1</sup> Academy of General Dentistry ([www.agd.org](http://www.agd.org)) <sup>2</sup> [www.perio.org](http://www.perio.org) – On-line poll of periodontists, 1999. "CIGNA Dental" refers to the following operating subsidiaries of CIGNA Corporation: **Connecticut General Life Insurance Company**, and CIGNA Dental Health, Inc. and its operating subsidiaries and affiliates. This document is provided by CIGNA solely for informational purposes to promote consumer health. It does not constitute medical advice and is not intended to be a substitute for proper dental care provided by a dentist. CIGNA assumes no responsibility for any circumstances arising out of the use, misuse, interpretation or application of any information supplied in this document. Always consult with your doctor for appropriate examinations, treatment, testing, and care recommendations. 11/10 ©2010 CIGNA