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## Afraid of shots at the dentist?

There are more ways than ever to alleviate a shot phobia. *by Dr. Susan Maples*

Q: I have developed an extreme needle phobia so I avoid the dentist and live with guilt. What can be done to help people like me?

A: You are SO not alone. Many people are afraid of injections and make it known on their very first phone contact. Here are some things to consider:

The first examination will likely be shot-free. And knowledge is power. Recognize the difference between knowing what your conditions and choices are and taking action. When you know about your conditions you can better weigh the benefits and risks of treatment options (including the risk of doing nothing). Remember that YOU, and you alone, are in charge of your own medical/dental treatment choices. Therefore, learn all you can about your present conditions. You never know, it might empower you to move mountains in your own behalf.

No health care provider gives more injections than a dentist. Hopefully *your* dentist has become an expert in painless injections. Don't hesitate to ask about the techniques he or she has developed to distract you and ease the pain. Topical (ointment) anesthetics can be incredibly effective these days—though the topical must be left in place for 3-5 minutes prior to injection. Next, your dentist (or hygienist) must be patient--the injection must be slow, slow, SLOW, in order to alleviate the discomfort of tissue expansion from the delivery of the anesthetic.

There are multiple distraction and relaxation amenities available today. Starting with medications: Nitrous oxide is a relaxing gas that can be turned up or down during the appointment. Many people only use "nitrous" during the injection itself. Deeper anti-anxiety medications such as Valium, Ativan or Xanax can be prescribed as well, but you must have a driver for the ride home. If you feel you must be asleep for the injection there are a handful of dental offices in town that offer "sleep dentistry" which is conscious sedation, or a light, "twilight sleep". Again, a driver is required.

In addition to medications, some offer deep tissue or pressure point massage, aroma therapy, hypnosis or stand up comedy (well...maybe?)- anything to distract the brain from focusing on the injection.

If you are interested in a more permanent and self-supporting solution for a severe needle phobia consider contacting a therapist who offers E.M.D.R. (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). EMDR is the treatment of choice for post traumatic stress disorder and often produces dramatic relief

from a phobia that has precipitated from a stressful incident. Many people can even remember how the needle phobia began.