

# That's an awfully long needle!

Dental anxiety is real. Here's how to make it better. *by Dr. Susan Maples*

**R**esearch continues to show the importance of good oral health for your overall health. But there's one catch: You need to see your dentist at least twice a year. That's a problem if you've got dental anxiety that afflicts 75 percent of Americans or worse yet, a true dental phobia that flat out keeps you away unless you have a life-threatening emergency.

The antiseptic smell, the shrill whine of the drill, the shot with the unusually long needle, the ensuing numbness, the claustrophobia or feeling of being pinned down in the chair.....No wonder so many of us freak out!

Dental fear usually develops as a result of a disturbing dental experience, often during childhood, especially if it triggered feelings of helplessness or lack of control. If you have dental anxiety, the relationship with your dentist becomes critically important. You must be in the



hands of someone who is sensitive to your fears and identifies the sensory triggers that tend to set off your alarm.

Some dental teams provide multi-sensory distraction options that include things like heat, dim light (such as sunglasses), sound (such as headphones), smell (such as calming aromatherapy), therapeutic touch (such as a hand, foot, or pressure point massage), and vibration (such as a

vibrating chair pad). Further options including drugs ranging from "laughing gas" (nitrous oxide), mild prescription sedatives (Valium or Xanax), or IV conscious sedation can help you manage dental fear.

Soothing your dental fear is critical to managing your oral health and your overall health. By working with your dentist, you can develop a plan that will be successful for you.

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