

# Dental Patients

## **Apprehension of Dental Treatment**

It is common and perfectly normal to have some degree of apprehension or anxiety prior to receiving dental treatment. Some people however, have stronger feeling in this regard than others. These feelings may have been produced by a less than pleasant past experience, stories told by family or friends, or by the nature of the dental procedure itself (wisdom teeth removal). Dental treatment may be especially frightening to young children and patients with developmental disabilities.

Whatever the cause, apprehension or anxiety, can produce many unpleasant effects including heart palpitations, high blood pressure, upset stomach and trouble sleeping the night before the appointment. Many highly apprehensive patients avoid dental care for many years until their problems become so severe that they are forced to seek emergency care.

## **What is Sedation and Anesthesia?**

Sedation and anesthesia can make practically all dental and oral surgical procedures more pleasant and safer for the apprehensive patient. During the procedure, the anxiety that many people have can be controlled by administering sedative medications (like Valium). A sedated patient will not only be more relaxed but may also have limited memory of the procedure performed. In some instances the patient may also receive additional medications which will place the patient deeply asleep in a state of general anesthesia. In either case local anesthesia (Novocaine) is also administered to block the pain sensations during the procedure and to keep the mouth numb during recovery.

## **How is the Medication Administered?**

Sedative medications can be administered by breathing (nitrous oxide - laughing gas), orally (in liquid or pill form) or intravenously (IV). Nitrous oxide is the most common agent used to treat apprehensive patients and can be used either by itself or in combination with other medications. Oral medication allows the patient to take a sedative the night before for a restful night's sleep and eliminates the need for an



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IV. However, oral medication takes time to work and has limits on how sedated you can safely become.

Medication given intravenously (IV) has its effect rapidly so your dentist can give the precise amount needed for your level of anxiety. In addition, if more medication is needed during the procedure, the IV allows easy administration of additional medications. General anesthesia is almost always given intravenously (IV). The route selected by your dentist will depend on your current health status, your particular needs and the doctor's level of training.

## **How Am I Monitored During the Procedure?**

Depending on the depth of the sedation or anesthesia being used, as well as your own medical condition, various monitors will be used during your procedure to ensure your safety. These monitors vary from automatic blood pressure cuffs to the use of pulse oximeters which, through a light sensor, measure the oxygen concentration in your blood. For many patients, an EKG monitor is also used to monitor your heart rhythm.

In addition to the monitoring procedures, your doctor along with his/her trained staff will always be with you and will be observing you closely during your treatment.

## **Is Sedation and Anesthesia Safe?**

The use of sedation and anesthesia in dentistry has a commendable record of safety. This is due to the advanced training your doctor has and his/her commitment to your overall health. It is important to advise your doctor of all medications that you take as well as any changes in your health since your last visit.

In most states, a special permit is required to administer sedation and anesthesia. In order to qualify, your doctor has to provide evidence of advanced training in sedation and/or anesthesia and often a site visit is required to certify the facility in which you are treated. The ability to handle emergency situations as well as having specific emergency medications and equipment is a mandatory part of the permitting process.