



# Managing dental anxiety

**More than 1 in 4 Americans (27%) who have skipped routine dental care admit that it was because they were scared of going to the dentist.<sup>1</sup>** But avoiding routine dental visits can lead to poor oral health, pain and more costly and complex dental procedures in the future. Here's what causes dental anxiety and some tips on how you can overcome it.

## WHAT CAUSES DENTAL ANXIETY?

The causes of dental anxiety can vary, but some common factors include:

- Past negative experiences at the dentist, especially during childhood
- Anxious tendencies in general
- Concern or shame about poor oral health or dental hygiene
- Anxiety about paying for treatment
- Fear of possible pain
- Fear of needles or dental tools
- Fear of gagging or choking<sup>3</sup>

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**1 IN 4 SKIP  
ROUTINE DENTAL  
CARE**



**AROUND  
\$46 BILLION IS  
LOST EACH YEAR  
DUE TO DENTAL  
ISSUES<sup>2</sup>**



**ROUTINE CARE  
CAN HELP CATCH  
PROBLEMS EARLY**

# Managing dental anxiety (continued)

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## HOW CAN YOUR DENTIST AND HYGIENIST HELP?

Dental professionals are experienced in dealing with anxiety. It's important to be open with your dentist about any concerns. Don't be afraid to ask questions. By letting your dentist and dental hygienist know ahead of time about your anxiety, you'll have the opportunity to discuss care options. Your dentist can offer suggestions to help you relax. Be specific about what makes you nervous, including any previous experiences.

Perhaps you have felt pain in the past. If so, let the staff know, as your dentist may suggest a larger dose of a local anesthetic to numb the area of your mouth where the procedure takes place. Your dentist may also suggest methods to relieve pain after your visit.<sup>3</sup>

## ARE YOU ANXIOUS ABOUT PAYING FOR TREATMENT?

Talk to your dentist about arranging payment prior to your visit. It's also recommended that you ask your dentist to submit a predetermination of benefits for any dental services that may cost more than \$250. A predetermination of benefits will give you a total patient payment amount before any treatment is scheduled.

You may also want to look into purchasing dental insurance. Depending on your plan, dental insurance typically covers preventive visits at 80% or 100%, making preventive visits more affordable!

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

In addition to the help you receive from dentists, you may also want to try one or more of the following strategies to help manage anxiety:

- Ask friends and family if they recommend a dentist who is good at putting them at ease.
- Schedule your appointment at a time when you're under less stress, such as early morning.
- Avoid sugary foods and caffeine before your appointment. Eating a high-protein meal before a procedure can help stimulate the brain chemicals that reduce anxiety.
- Bring a friend or family member with you to the appointment, if visitors are allowed.
- Breathe deeply to help slow your heart rate and relax your muscles. Try inhaling while slowly counting to five, hold for a second, then breathe out slowly. Repeat as needed.
- Bring headphones and play music.
- Distract yourself with a stress ball or fidget toy.
- Agree on a signal to let your dentist know if you need a brief pause in treatment.

You're not alone when it comes to fighting dental anxiety. Communicate with your dental team, and they can help make you more comfortable. It's important to keep regular dental checkups and maintain good oral health habits.<sup>3</sup> Visiting the dentist regularly can help make treatment easier and less costly, in addition to keeping your smile healthy!

***Learn more about maintaining your oral health at [DeltaDental.com/us/en/protect-my-smile](https://www.DeltaDental.com/us/en/protect-my-smile).***

<sup>1</sup>DDPA 2020 Adult's Oral Health & Well-Being Survey. <sup>2</sup>[cdc.gov/nccdphp/priorities/oral-disease.html](https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/priorities/oral-disease.html). <sup>3</sup>[deltadental.com/us/en/protect-my-smile/visiting-the-dentist/dental-anxiety/dealing-with-dental-anxiety.html](https://www.deltadental.com/us/en/protect-my-smile/visiting-the-dentist/dental-anxiety/dealing-with-dental-anxiety.html)