

OVERCOMING DENTAL PHOBIAS THE CHRIS SIDDONS WAY!

Nobody likes going to the dentist. But for some people, the problems run deeper and form a phobia. The causes of dental phobia can be many and varied.

Sometimes, one of the biggest challenges that a dentist has is when a patient with a phobia cannot necessarily articulate where their fear comes from. This makes the phobia more difficult to understand and manage, and is often the case when the phobia is based around a long-distant childhood memory. The patient does not necessarily need to be conscious of the memory for it to influence their behaviour as an adult. In many ways, phobias become all the more powerful because we do not understand it fully. Rather than trying to understand phobias, many choose to ignore it and visit the dentist less and less. In many cases the sights, sounds and smells of the dental practice prove to be powerful environment triggers.

A survey by the British Dental Association found that fear of the dentist affects one in four people. However, it is likely to be a much higher figure in reality, as many people refuse to admit their fear. Instead, because they are confused by their phobia, they blame their inability to visit the dentist on other factors, such as cost or time.

For many patients the secret to managing their dental fear or phobia is as simple as finding a dentist that they feel comfortable with. In modern practices, most dentists will be trained to support patients suffering from stress, anxiety or fear, whether that involves consultation, communication, distraction or behaviour management. Often, especially if it is a patient suffering from a fear of the unknown, a dentist who does not take the time to explain procedures and to ensure that their patient feels comfortable with them, will only worry the patient more. This can lead to the kind of behaviour where patients worry more and more and then feel less and less comfortable visiting the dentist as time goes on. A good dentist will begin building a relationship at consultation stage which means that their patients trust them, understand them and know what their treatment involves.

In many cases the initial consultation is the start of the solution, not simply so we understand your fear more but also so you get to know your dentist and relax more. Other patients also find it beneficial to register with a dentist who specialises in treating dental phobic patients. Dentists with particular skills in this area will be able to work with individuals to discuss their fears and outline different possible treatments. In most cases, this will go beyond simple behavioural management and will also include considering the most up-to-date products on the market, which help to reduce pain, for example, or using a sedation package which can include a tablet to relax the patient the night before treatment, one on the morning and one just before treatment if it is scheduled in for later in the day. IV sedation is also a very good option for patients who just can't overcome their deep seated fears.

The final part of a possible solution could be counselling, therapy or hypnosis, conducted by a certified professional. This should only be applicable to patients suffering from a deep-seated dental phobia. In the majority of cases, the starting points of patients would be to speak to their dentist, rather than a doctor. As dental phobias become more widely understood, more and more dentists are becoming familiar with how to treat them effectively.

Here at The Burley Dental Suite, Dr Siddons treats his nervous patients with a variety of methods, often times our patients say that once they have visited the practice for a consultation and met the whole team, much of their nervousness disappears!