

Dental Treatment for Anxious Patients

Can I cope with injection in the gum?

No one likes having dental treatment but many of us manage to accept our dentistry with the help of an injection in the gum, (local anaesthetic). Some of us however require alternative methods of pain and anxiety control. There are a number of these, which can be used either alone, or in conjunction with the familiar local anaesthetic. Your dentist will understand your anxieties and will be pleased to discuss your options.

General anaesthesia (GA) is now largely confined to the hospital environment. There are still a small number of patients, especially children, but also some adults, where the treatment is best provided under a GA and for whom appropriate referral to hospital is justified.

To replace GA there is a range of safer modern alternatives. The range extends from “tender loving care” right through to conscious sedation provided by your dentist giving an injection in your arm or hand.

Oral sedation, inhalational sedation and the injection in the arm are the more commonly used techniques but some dentists can produce good results using hypnosis or acupuncture either alone or in conjunction with other treatment methods. Should you feel these alternatives are for you, talk to your dentist.

Will oral sedation help me?

Oral sedatives are taken by mouth in the form of tablets, capsules or liquids. These drugs can either be used to relax you before your trip to the dentist (pre-medication) or act as a sedative to help you when you are having treatment. Your dentist will need to know about your general health and any medication you are taking.

Inhalational sedation

A specially designed machine delivers the gases and can be adjusted by your dentist in response to your needs. You may experience a warm tingly feeling which allows you more easily to accept dental treatment. There are requirements both before and after treatment with inhalational sedation and the instructions given by your dentist must be strictly followed.



In this method of sedation you breathe a mixture of special gases which act to relax you. The most common combination is nitrous oxide and oxygen which is also known by other names like “gas and air”, “entonox” or “relative analgesia”.

This technique is very safe with a rapid recovery time and is good for adults but is especially good when treating anxious children. The mixture of gases is delivered through a small comfortable nosepiece, which is positioned to cover the nose and not the mouth.

What about conscious sedation?

Conscious sedation is a form of anxiety control which makes treatment more pleasant for the patient. It is effective, predictable and very safe.

Conscious is the modern alternative to general anaesthesia for most dental procedures.

Where general anaesthesia was used in the past, progressive hospitals now use conscious sedation.

Conscious sedation can be given in a number of ways. Intravenous sedation is the most commonly used form in adults. Your dental surgeon will advise you if any other techniques are appropriate.

Conscious sedation will make you feel sleepy and relaxed. Most patients can remember little or nothing of the procedure, but it does not affect any part of your memory before the drug was given.

Following your sedation, you will be required to stay at the practice until the dental surgeon is satisfied that you are safe to be accompanied home by a responsible adult. This is because your judgement may be affected for anything up to the next 24 hours.

As the drowsiness wears off, you may notice that your mouth is numb. Please be careful not to burn or bite yourself until the numbness wears off. Numbness may last a few hours.

Conscious sedation is a very powerful and safe way of reducing anxiety to allow dental treatment during difficult or prolonged dentistry.