



Barry Manilow, Key to Overcoming Dental Anxiety?

Relaxing in a comfortable chair, wrapped in an afghan listening to Barry Manilow may not be how one envisions a dental visit. However, for fans of the pop star, this specialized care helps some patients soothe dental anxiety. Many dentists are turning to music, television, pillows, blankets, aromatherapy, calming office decor and even virtual reality glasses to help patients overcome dental anxiety.

New amenities may help create a calming, friendly environment, yet studies prove that the most important factor in overcoming dental anxiety is good dentist-patient communication, according to a recent article in AGD Impact, the newsmagazine of the Academy of General Dentistry.

Studies show 25 million Americans don't go to the dentist because of fear and anxiety.

"Today's practicing dentists recognize dental anxiety is a real condition," says William Kuttler, DDS, FAGD, spokesperson for the Academy of General Dentistry, an organization of general dentists dedicated to continuing education. "Helping patients overcome their fear of visiting the dentist has become just as important as mastering the latest clinical technique."

Establishing trust and keeping patients informed and in control throughout a visit to the dentist helps calm dental anxiety. One option is using hand signals to communicate with the dentist throughout a procedure. "If patients feel uncomfortable, all they have to do is signal and we stop," says Dr. Kuttler. "Empowering the patient ensures they return and makes visiting the dentist a priority in one's overall health care routine."

Patients can help by discussing their fear of visiting the dentist openly and honestly with the dentist.

If not addressed, dental anxiety can lead to unnecessary oral health problems as a result of avoiding the dentist-which in turn, can end up leading to much more time spent in the dental chair when treatment is the only option.

Regular six-month preventive check-ups help detect oral health problems early, acquainting patients with procedures that can help overcome fears of visiting the dentist.

Patient tips for overcoming dental anxiety

- Talk to your dentist, they can help.
- Avoid caffeine and sugar before a dental appointment; they may make you anxious.
- Schedule dental appointments early before stressed or rushed.
- Focus on relaxing; breathe regularly and slowly during the procedure.
- Use hand signals to inform the dentists when uncomfortable.
- Call 1-877-2X-A-YEAR (1-877-292-9327) to find a highly-qualified dentist.

The Academy of General Dentistry is a non-profit organization of more than 35,000 general dentists dedicated to staying up-to-date in the profession through continuing education. A general dentist is the primary care provider for patients of all ages and is responsible for the diagnosis, treatment, management and overall coordination of services related to patient's oral health needs. Learn more about AGD member dentists or find more information on dental health topics at www.agd.org/consumer.

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Note: Information that appears in *General Dentistry*, the AGD's peer-reviewed journal, *AGD Impact*, the AGD's newsmagazine and related press releases do not necessarily reflect the endorsement of the AGD.

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