

How to handle dental anxiety



More than half of Americans with dental anxiety have delayed or cancelled dental care because of their anxiety.¹ But avoiding routine dental visits can lead to poor oral health, pain, and more costly and complex dental procedures. These tips can help you overcome anxiety and take control of your oral health.

Understand what causes your dental anxiety.

It's hard to get help with your anxiety if you don't know what causes it. Some common triggers for dental anxiety are:

- Pain or discomfort during procedures
- Large or unexpected out-of-pocket costs
- Embarrassment about oral health
- Sounds, smells or tastes tied to procedures
- Loss of control and invasion of personal space
- Tools in and around the mouth
- Gagging or choking
- Generalized anxiety
- Being pressured into unnecessary treatment

Talk to your dentist and hygienist about your anxiety.

Let your dental care team know about your anxiety early so you can discuss different treatment options and strategies. Be specific about what makes you nervous, including previous experiences.

When to mention your anxiety

- Before your appointment, you can call your dental office to confirm that they allow headphones, weighted blankets or bringing a support person.
- For most other needs, you can mention that you'd like to discuss anxiety accommodations while you check in or as you walk back to the exam room.

What works to help calm one person's anxiety could make another's anxiety worse, so your dentist may not make adjustments for you without you asking. Your care team wants you to get the health care you need. Help them do that by starting the conversation.

Try a combination of strategies.

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:

- **Write down your triggers, questions or suggestions.** Do this before you start feeling anxious, so you know you won't forget anything.
- **Use a signal to show your care team that you need a break.** Make sure it's something you can do while reclined and that it's noticeable to someone focused on your mouth.
- **Ask your hygienist and dentist to narrate their actions.** If you dislike the uncertainty of getting dental care, ask your team to tell you what they're doing and why.
- **Bring comforting or distracting tools from home.** Bring a weighted blanket, headphones, fidget toys or anything portable that helps you stay calm.
- **Consider medical intervention.** Your dentist may be able to prescribe anxiety medication before your appointment or stronger sedatives during the appointment.

You're not alone when it comes to fighting dental anxiety. Communicate with your dental care team and they'll use their experience to help make you more comfortable.

Find the right dentist.

Sometimes dentists just aren't the right fit. Whether you're concerned about cost or quality, Delta Dental dentists are your best bet.

- Save the most on care when you visit dentists that are in your Delta Dental network.
- Use the **Find a dentist** tool to search for in-network dentists near you. You can filter results based on your criteria (like office hours, languages spoken and specialties) or check Yelp reviews.
- Plan ahead and avoid unnecessary costs by asking your dentist to request a pre-treatment estimate from Delta Dental.
- Feel confident knowing that Delta Dental dentists are held to high standards for licensing, cleanliness and safety.



**Start looking for an in-network dentist at
deltadentalins.com/find-a-dentist.**



¹ Dental Anxiety Exploration Report, Delta Dental Insurance Company. November 2025.

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