

Understanding dental anxiety



For many people, going to the dentist is a manageable experience. They might feel nervous about a cleaning or ashamed of not flossing enough, but they rarely delay or avoid appointments because of those feelings.

For others, the thought of going to the dentist causes anxiety that makes seeking routine care difficult. Left unchecked, this dental anxiety can become a vicious cycle of avoidance, worsening health outcomes and more severe anxiety.

What is dental anxiety?

Dental anxiety isn't always easy to identify. In fact, 2 in 5 sufferers don't realize they experience higher anxiety about the dentist than others.¹ Mild nervousness is normal, but anxiety that starts far in advance of an appointment and persists throughout is not.

If you experience several of these symptoms before or during dental appointments, you may have dental anxiety:

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|  Elevated pulse |  Shortness of breath |  Difficulty concentrating |
|  Unusual sweating |  Muscle tension |  Trouble sleeping |
|  Feeling nervous, uncertain or afraid |  The urge to avoid the cause of the anxiety | |

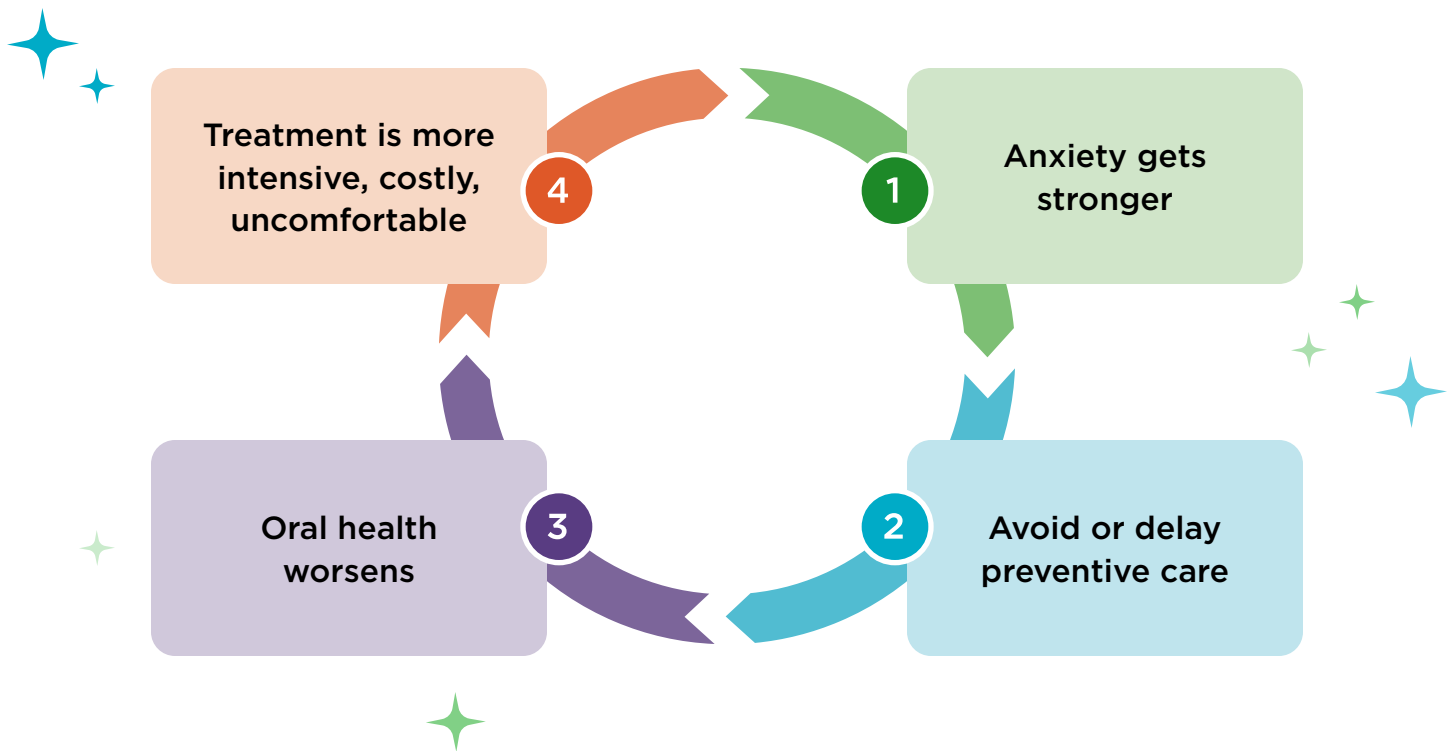
Costs and anxiety are the top 2 reasons people avoid the dentist.²



Don't make a habit of avoiding care

Rescheduling a cleaning every so often isn't a problem. However, when you repeatedly delay routine exams and cleanings, small issues like mild gum irritation can grow into diseases that can be more painful and costly to treat, like periodontal disease.

The same goes for problems that spring up between cleanings, like sudden jaw pain, tooth sensitivity or mouth injuries. Getting immediate care for these issues helps keep costs and discomfort down. Dental anxiety can be a self-reinforcing cycle. Luckily, the cycle can be broken by identifying the causes of your dental anxiety and learning how to cope with them.



Learning how to manage your dental anxiety is important to maintaining good oral health. If you think you have dental anxiety, talk to your dental care team and work together on a plan to handle it.

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

² 2023 Dental Consumer Landscape Study, Delta Dental.

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