

Ask Dr. Huff...At 33, should I still be afraid to go to the dentist?



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Dental fear and anxiety is as old as the profession itself. When you think about it, there are few things as threatening as

put their fingers in your mouth. Topping that off is the reputation that early dentistry has bestowed upon us today.

In the early days of dentistry in this country, the town barber was also the dentist. Treatment was simple. Crude instruments called "tooth keys" were used to torque teeth out quickly under the "profound" anesthetic of a stiff shot of liquor. A recent program on the Discovery Channel suggested that our ancient ancestors may have bored holes

into their teeth, presumably to release pressure from inflamed dental pulps. These must have been grueling dental times!

Actually, it wasn't until the late 1960s when the high speed dental handpiece was invented. In fact, my predecessor, Dr. Henry Deetz, was very proud of the fact that he was the first in our town to have a high speed handpiece. He was very progressive in that day. Since then, we have seen the development of air abrasion units, dental lasers, refined high speed handpieces, better anesthetic medications, digital imaging and x-rays, high-tech dental materials, etc. Most of these improvements have been geared toward making the dental experience less traumatic, less painful, shorter, and more patient-friendly.

Most modern dental practices try to incorporate other factors such as multi-

media entertainment, soothing decor, and customer service into their offices to enhance the dental experience for our patients. In my practice, we have found that educated patients tend to have much less fear than those who do not understand what is happening in their mouths. Therefore, we spend a great deal of time utilizing digital imaging and computerized education modules to educate our patients. Often, even the worst dentalphobics do quite well in our office, even without sedative medications. In some cases, sedative medications can be used to reduce dental anxiety. The best way to address dental fear is to prevent it from ever occurring.

Most children today have a great advantage. Since we are encouraging parents to have their children seen by a dentist as early as 2 years of age, we hope that children can benefit from never

having to experience even the slightest unpleasantness of the dental office. It is so rewarding to see children come in visit after visit excited to see the dentist and have their teeth "made bright and shiny." In an era where refined sugar overwhelms the average child's diet, we still, however, see many children who come to the dentist for the first time after significant damage has been done. The battle to calm dental fear has already suffered a significant blow at this point. Parents, please contact your dentist within 6 months of the eruption of the first tooth to schedule a dental exam for your child.

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