



NUTRITIONALLY SPEAKING

Coping with fear of needles

Dear Dr. Meinig: I hate going to the dentist so much that I often postpone my regular visits. It isn't the dental treatment so much as it is the needles. I'm pretty good with medical shots, but the dental ones petrify me. Can something be done to help overcome this fear? I don't want to lose my

teeth, but I'm afraid this fear of shots will keep me away from the dentist.
L.W.

Dear L.W.: The fear you speak of is very real, but has been allowed to grow in magnitude to an abnormal degree. You are not alone. Hardly a day goes by in the life of a dentist that he doesn't hear similar statements. Not only that, but far too many with these feelings end up suffering unbearable toothaches for days at a time, and worse yet, most eventually lose all their teeth because of the neglect their fear engendered.

NUMBERS OF approaches are available to lessen your fright and make dental treatment possible. The first of these is not to try and hide your fear, but to advise your dentist about it. He will often ask if there has been an unfavorable circumstance with dental treatment in the past. Many times it is shots received during infancy or childhood in medical offices, but unfavorable experiences do occur in dental offices.

This can happen quite easily

when a child's first visit to a dentist has been caused by a toothache or accident and also happens when overly worried parents transfer their own fears to the child by unfortunate statements. Fortunately, most children handle such experiences quite well, in fact often better than adults. At any rate, getting back at the reasons that caused one's fear can do much to enable one to learn to face the problem and to thereby alleviate and soften their apprehension.

METHODS OF coping with your terror can be reasonably easy and simple, such as a prescription from your dentist for a tranquilizer or sedative medication. In some offices, attention-diverters such as relaxing music, via earphones or television, prove sufficient of offset one's dread of treatment. Also, small doses of nitrous oxide (laughing gas) from patient-controlled machines have proved successful. When the person has a severe phobia, intravenous or intramuscular sedation can be used, and for some, general anes-

thesia is an available method to prevent the loss of one's teeth.

When this kind of fright becomes so out of hand that none of these approaches are acceptable to the patient, the services of a psychiatrist or psychologist should be secured. While our ability to make artificial dentures appear like normal teeth is advanced, false teeth never function as well as the natural ones.

INASMUCH AS your question is also a problem to so many others, the following letter was written and given to patients who complained of fear of injections. Although it was presented in an earlier column, it would be worth repeating for reader L.W. and others with similar concern about injections.

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Dear Patients:

The following information about people's agitation and fear of needles was first presented to my patients in 1959 and later was incorporated into an answer to a question in my column in the Ojai Valley News. With but a few changes, it is offered to you as suggested

reading in order to make your future dental care more comfortable.

The work of early pioneers in dentistry is greatly responsible for the vast growing number of people who now readily accept dental treatment. In spite of this, it is an everyday occurrence for all dentists to have one or more patients say: "I don't mind dental treatment, doctor, but I do hate that needle." Many of these patients seem to take delight in embellishing and portraying (often with great acting ability) how dreadful it is for them to have a local anesthetic. Dentists know that this is not the usual response, and for the most part is being greatly exaggerated. Still, such remarks do reflect that excessive fear exists for many individuals. Perhaps you, too, have had similar feelings.

THE ONLY bad part of such thoughts is that they tend to grow and eventually displace reality. In order to help people counter this harmful thinking, I have asked my patients to picture anesthetics as their friend, not their enemy. I have

reminded them that anesthetics were first discovered by a dentist, (not a physician), and that he did so in order to eliminate pain, certainly not to cause it. It seems to me that of all the inventions of modern times...and that includes airplanes, television, automobiles, etc.... none, absolutely none, have done so much for man as the pain-relieving contribution of anesthetics.

Then, too, most dentists today have become so skillful that many times our patients do not even know when an injection has been made. In any case, if there is discomfort it is slight and of very brief duration.

IN THE FUTURE, let not your mind be troubled but think only of the privilege that is yours in being able to have an anesthetic. Dwell on the comfort it will give you for, if you do, you will then remember to think of anesthetics as your friend...your very best friend.

Everyone has a question about nutrition. Send yours to Dr. George E. Meinig, C/O Ojai Valley News, Box 277, Ojai, CA 93023.