

# Sleep Dentistry

*welcome to hawaii*

by: Dr. Bosler

Visiting Hawaii while at the dental office? Sounds a bit far fetched, doesn't it? Wouldn't it be nice if a trip to the dentist could be as pleasant as a day at the beach?

Do you feel uneasy about going to the dentist? If your answer is yes, you are not alone. In fact, millions of Americans feel so nervous at the dentist, they avoid going altogether. Fortunately, ways to calm those nerves and get you through your dental appointment are now widely available. One option is sleep dentistry, also known as conscious sedation or as a lighter form, anxiolysis.

## A Forgettable Experience

Barbara Scott's dental phobia dates back to her early childhood days. She's never responded well to medications used to numb the mouth before a dental procedure, so she'd endure drilling and filling without the benefit of full pain relief. "I can remember sitting there with tears running down my face," she says.

Those experiences were the stuff nightmares are made of. Throughout her adult life, Scott, an executive secretary in Southern California, would suffer panic attacks at the thought of going to the dentist, so she'd postpone visits and the dental problems would only get worse. "It's a vicious cycle," she says. When she would finally muster up the courage to get help, dentists would spend up to two hours giving her novocain shots to try to get her mouth numb, with mixed results. A bad gag reflex only compounded the problem.

Now in her early 50's, Scott is still terrified of the dental chair. Finally her fears are able to ease up thanks to an anxiety-relieving approach called oral conscious sedation that's gaining steam in dental offices around the country. Though this technique has been promoted as a way to "sleep through your dental appointment," patients are not actually asleep. They can still respond to a dentist's questions and commands but aren't likely to remember any of it. Being oblivious to what's transpired in the dental chair is the beauty of the approach. "The next thing I knew, I was home," Scott said excitedly.

## Oral Conscious Sedation Dentistry

It's called conscious because you are still aware of where you are but you are so relaxed that you no longer

feel anxious about your surroundings. Oral sedation is administered in the form of a small pill which you swallow or dissolve under the tongue. One sedative that is very popular is triazolam. It is very closely related to valium chemically. The differences being, with triazolam, there is a much deeper relaxation and amnesia effect than with valium and it is shorter acting.

## Is Oral Sedation Right for Me?

Sleep dentistry is now popularly used to help address dental anxiety. Contrary to its name, sleep dentistry won't actually put patients to sleep. It makes use of sedatives and pain relievers that will put them into a relaxed or sleep-like state. It is often used as an anti-anxiety agent to help keep them calm during dental visits, and is frequently used along with local anesthetics.

The goal of sedation is to minimize pain and discomfort during treatment. Unlike deep sedation, where dentists use general anesthesia, conscious sedation enables you to respond to speech or touch, so you can communicate any discomfort to your dentist.

After your procedure you are rested, you may have no recollection of your dental visit at all, and your smile is healthier and more beautiful than ever. In fact, one person enjoyed the experience so much, he reported he was dreaming he was on the beach in Hawaii!

## Oral Sedation has many benefits.

Oral sedation is great for those afraid of the dentist (dental-phobics), for people who want to have dentistry without anxiety and also for those who have a difficult time getting numb. It's also great for those who gag easily. I emphasize this; sedation dentistry is great for those who need to have a lot of dentistry done, as it allows many appointments to be condensed into just a few!

## Commonly Asked Questions About Sedation Dentistry

*Will I feel any pain?*

Most patients feel no discomfort whatsoever during their treatment and feel surprisingly good afterwards. You still get "numb" with local anesthetic but tend not to mind it at all.

*Will I be totally relaxed?*

You'll receive just enough sedation so that you'll be very relaxed and anxiety will melt away. Some patients even take a nap.

*Will I remember anything?*

At the end of the treatment, you may have little or no memory of your dental visit.

*Will I be groggy after my treatment is over?*

You will feel wonderfully relaxed and free from worry or anxiety. For your safety, it is required that you have a family member or friend drive you home, and that you do not drive for 24 hours.

*Is Sedation Dentistry safe for me?*

Before starting any treatment, the dentist will review your medical history, and will monitor you very closely while you're sedated. If you are not suitable for sedation he will recommend alternative treatment.

*Why do we only use a pill and not general anesthesia?*

This is because 99% of the time deep sedation or general anesthesia is just not necessary for general dentistry. Certainly, deep sedation and general anesthesia carry increased risks and longer recovery time. Another important thing is that some people who come to the dentist are actually afraid of needles, and don't want an I.V. in their arm. The pill, a qualified dentist uses, is placed under the tongue, allowed to dissolve and that's it! How much easier can that be?

*Are there any special restrictions prior to sedation dentistry?*

Yes, there are. You will be instructed not to eat or drink anything after 7pm the night before your appointment. Sedation cases are usually scheduled first thing in the morning so that you do not stay hungry for too long. Breakfast is the only meal you will miss. No sedatives or alcohol may be consumed 24 hours prior to or after your appointment and no stimulants, smoking or caffeine 12 hours before or after your appointment. Of course, you'll need a responsible person to drive you to your appointment, and return to bring you back home again after your appointment is over.

*What if I'm pressed for time?*

If you lead a busy lifestyle, sedation dentistry can help you accomplish the work of multiple dental visits in a single day.

*What if my loved ones have special needs?*

Sedation dentistry is also perfect for the disabled patient with Down's Syndrome, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other conditions which make it difficult to get dental treatment.

*How about gagging?*

This is another great benefit with sedation dentistry. Patients who gag easily have a much easier time with sedation dentistry, and find that their gag reflex is greatly reduced or non-existent with sedation.

*The right choice for you.*

Your dentist makes every effort to assure that your dentistry is done in the most comfortable manner possible. For many patients this means offering sedation dentistry. It may just be the best thing that can ever happen to your teeth. With this type of sedation helping you overcome your fear of the dentist, you can finally give your teeth the care and attention they need and deserve. Be sure to ask your dentist about all your sedation options to help calm those dental-visit nerves. ■

Dr. Bosler is a local dentist specializing in cosmetic dentistry. He can be reached at 449-3661.

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