



DENTAL CARE

Overcoming Your Fears

Anxiety about dental visits is common but there are ways to work through it.

Often referred to as dentophobia, this fear carries a big risk. Avoiding dental checkups isn't just detrimental to your teeth; it can also negatively affect your overall well-being. Here are a few strategies to help manage your anxiety:

WHAT IS DENTOPHOBIA?

Dentophobia is characterized as an intense, often debilitating fear of dental visits. It's important to distinguish between general fears and a phobia. Fear involves strong feelings of discomfort or stress that may lead to avoidance, while a phobia is more severe. Sufferers experience significant distress and disruptions to their everyday lives.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

If your fear progresses to a phobia, consider seeking out professional help. Therapists and medical professionals can offer targeted interventions, including options like exposure therapy. This approach involves gradually acclimating to the experience by visiting a dentist's office without undergoing an exam until your anxiety begins to subside over time. Some patients have had success simply through talk therapy with a professional. In other cases, medications may be prescribed to alleviate acute anxiety symptoms during your dental visits.

MANAGING ANXIETY

For milder fears or general anxiety over a visit to the dental chair, try a few simple calming techniques. It may make a big difference if you simply choose a morning appointment, when the office is less crowded and quieter. That could reduce exposure to

distressing noises or a surrounding flurry of activity. Try noise-cancelling headphones to drown out unsettling sounds or try listening to soothing music during your appointment. Practice deep breathing exercises and meditation to find a greater sense of calm before and during your visit. Consider bringing along a supportive friend or family

member for comfort and encouragement.

YOUR BENEFITS

Regular visits to the dentist are critically important for maintaining an attractive smile and your general health. A professional cleaning every six months promotes optimal dental hygiene and helps prevent serious conditions such as

cavities, oral cancer and gum disease. Treatment may assist patients in combating everyday issues like dry mouth and bad breath.

As you work to overcome dentophobia, you'll be safeguarding your health and potentially saving on costlier procedures later, while steadily growing your confidence in seeking care.



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Why Flossing Is Important

There are places even a conscientious brusher simply can't reach.

Frequent brushing doesn't mean you get to skip flossing. There are simply too many hidden areas in your mouth. That's where flossing comes in. Dental professionals recommend doing it once a day.

It doesn't matter whether you floss before or after brushing, according to the American Dental Association. One survey revealed that a little more than half of people prefer to floss beforehand, while the rest opt for flossing afterward. Approach the process in the manner that feels right to you, just be sure to floss regularly.

FLOSSING'S EFFECT

Why is flossing so important? It serves as a key defense against dental issues in those tight spaces your toothbrush simply can't reach. Consistent flossing can help prevent cavities, remove plaque under the gumline that could turn into tartar and ward off gingivitis, the latter of which may eventually lead to gum disease. The challenge for many is fitting it into a busy schedule. Carving out time by waking up earlier, staying awake a bit longer, or even keeping floss handy for your lunch break can make a big difference over time.

HOW TO FLOSS

About half of Americans

don't floss regularly and many don't do it correctly. Proper technique will ensure the most effective dental care. Start by pulling out at least 18 inches of floss and then winding it around your fingers to create good tension. Carefully guide the floss between each pair of teeth, ensuring that

every gap is addressed. Press the string firmly against the tooth, gently sliding it along the surface while keeping the motion away from your gums.

SPREAD THE WORD

Once you've mastered the art of flossing, share this important routine with

younger family members. As a parent, you'll be their first guide to establishing healthy dental routines. Parents and guardians can assist kids with flossing until they develop adequate fine motor skills. (That's usually around the age of 10.) Encourage them by explaining the benefits while

reassuring them that flossing shouldn't hurt. If anyone experiences discomfort during this process, slow down and be extra gentle to avoid any unnecessary irritation. Encourage kids to talk about flossing with classmates, neighbors and cousins, too.



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Fighting Gum Disease

One of the biggest threats to good dental health can hide in plain sight.

Gum disease isn't as noticeable and painful as a cavity, but the dangers are very real. Gingivitis occurs when tartar, plaque and bacteria accumulate below the gum line, quietly causing damage. As the condition worsens, sufferers experience bleeding while brushing their teeth. Gums eventually become red and swollen. This is the earliest stage of periodontal disease. If left untreated, gingivitis can progress to periodontitis — a more advanced and severe condition that involves tooth and even jawbone loss.

WATCH FOR SYMPTOMS

Gingivitis is your body's inflammatory response when plaque and tartar remain on your teeth or their roots for extended periods. (Gingivitis may be contagious if the bacteria is transmitted through saliva-to-saliva contact.) Reports suggest that nearly half of those aged 30 and older experience some form of gum disease. Common signs of gingivitis include gums that bleed easily, persistent bad breath even after brushing, sensitivity to temperature changes, redness and swelling in the gums, and discomfort or pain while chewing. If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, talk to your dental professional.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Several factors increase anyone's risk of developing gingivitis. Most sufferers tend to be men, with a higher concentration among smokers or tobacco users, those living in poverty and people with less than a high school education. Hormonal fluctuations during pregnancy or other life stages may increase the chances for

women.

Diabetes and a family history of gum disease play a role. Some medications can exacerbate the condition by reducing saliva production.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

Schedule an appointment with your dentist or dental hygienist to discuss any symptoms that crop up. They'll

look beyond the bleeding you may have noticed, to look for loose teeth, any more serious infections and gum recession. X-rays might be required to assess bone loss beneath the gums.

In severe cases, you may be referred to a periodontist specializing in gum disease. A dentist may recommend procedures like root planing or

scaling. These deeper cleanings remove and prevent bacterial adhesion. Additionally, your dentist might prescribe an antimicrobial mouthwash to support your treatment.

After that, maintaining good oral hygiene and scheduling regular dental check-ups are crucial for ongoing management.



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If You Need Braces

More adults are getting braces to address long-standing dental issues.

In fact, about a quarter of the roughly four million Americans who wear braces aren't kids. Most seek treatment either because their teeth weren't aligned during childhood or have shifted over time. Others may find themselves in a better financial position to afford orthodontics later in life.

Teeth can shift in adulthood due to several factors: forward pressure from unaddressed wisdom teeth, bone loss around the teeth, the loss of a tooth, or even changes in how people hold their

mouths. Our gum and jawbone structures continue to evolve as we age, and that may result in alignment issues that push older people to seek out orthodontic care.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

Misaligned teeth aren't just a cosmetic issue. They are harder to clean, and that increases the risk of cavities, gum disease and other complications. There's a growing amount of evidence linking oral health to our general well-being, with oral inflammation now being linked to severe conditions such as heart or lung disease. That's only bolstered the number of adults who pursue this treatment.

Doctors now believe that braces and

aligners can improve your overall health, while still addressing any functional concerns like difficulty eating or speaking and helping for various aesthetic reasons.

GETTING STARTED

Experts in this field urge patients to avoid over-the-counter aligners, which may not be a good match for your mouth. These DIY kits can lead to new complications beyond worsening misalignment, including jaw issues and tooth erosion. Instead, seek out the reliable, personalized professional care provided by orthodontists.

NEW OPTIONS

If you'd like to avoid traditional

metal braces, newer options like lingual braces and transparent aligners offer more discreet alternatives. Lingual braces are placed inside the teeth so they remain largely unseen. Clear aligners fit snugly over the teeth and are worn continuously, except during meals or oral hygiene routines. Typically, any treatment lasts for 10 to 24 months, with regular adjustments every six to 12 weeks.

Cost can be the main consideration for people who put off getting braces until later in life. Braces or aligners can cost thousands of dollars. Many orthodontists offer payment plans that can help make payments more manageable.

Changing Dentists?

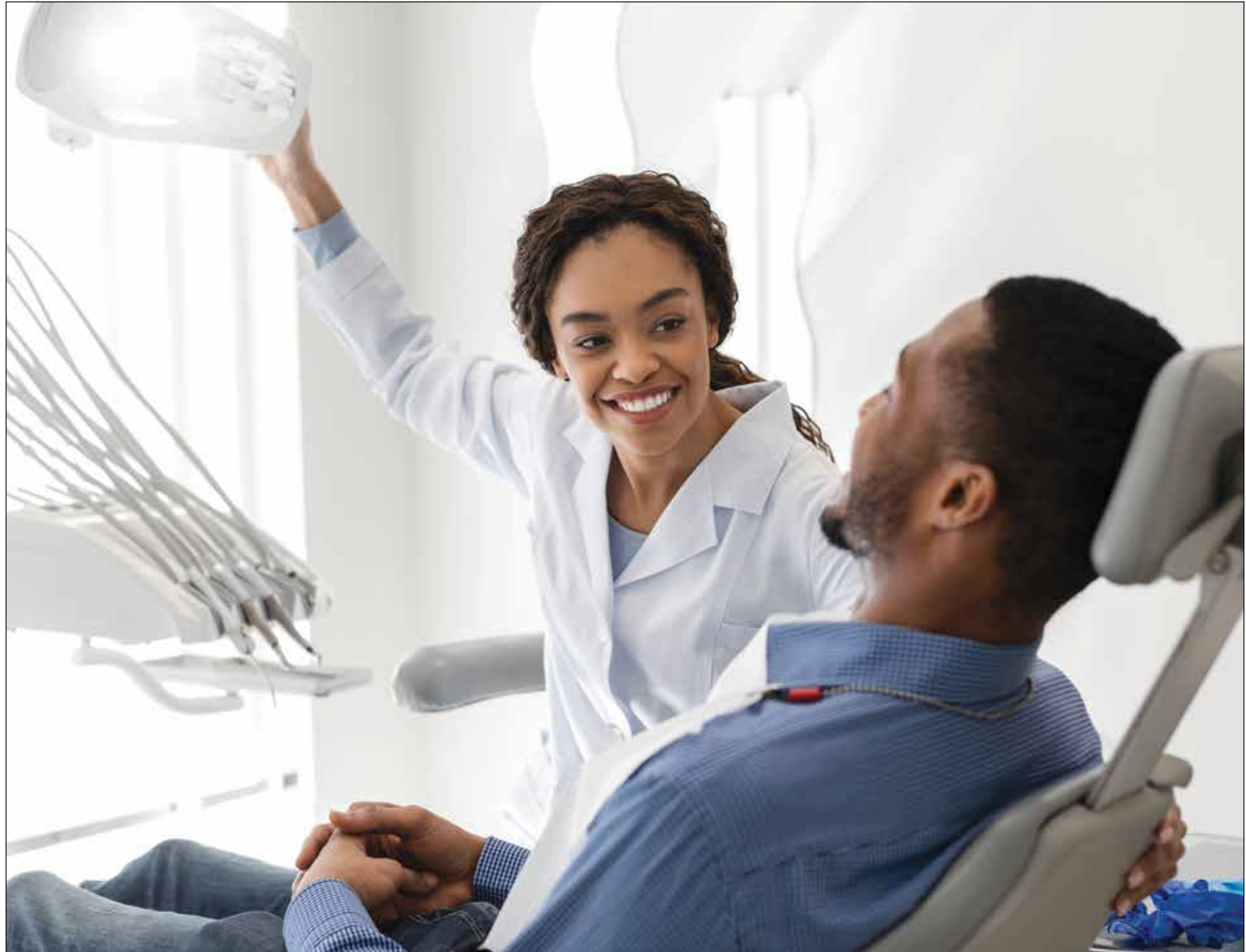
Finding a new “dental home” might lessen the effect of an already intimidating experience.

Anxiety over visiting the dentist is quite common. More than a third of Americans deal with some level of it, according to a study by the National Institutes of Health. If you’ve exhausted every treatment and still aren’t comfortable with your current dentist, it might be time to choose a new one.

You don’t want nervousness over visiting a dental professional to affect your health. Here’s how to find your new “dental home,” with a focus on medical treatment that addresses your needs while creating a safe and welcoming environment.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

For those with dental anxiety, choosing a practice where you feel at ease can make all the difference. Sometimes, the fine print plays a big role: Make sure the new office is conveniently located with hours that work within your own schedule. Anxiety builds if you’re always rushing or late to get there. Make sure any candidate is within your insurance network, and that they belong to professional organizations like the American Dental Association. Ask how emergencies are handled during off-hours. Finally, make sure you have an easy rapport



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both with the dentist and the staff. That goes a long way to easing worry.

MAKING THE CHOICE

Ask friends and family about their dentists or check local dental societies for recommendations. The ADA offers an online Find-A-Dentist tool

where you can conduct searches by location, specialty or name. For those with affordability concerns, visit nearby dental schools or your local health department. They can assist in finding low-cost care.

BEFORE YOU DECIDE

Most dental offices now

offer consultations before you start treatments. Set one up with several candidates and prepare a list of questions to ask during your visit. Bring your health records to help with evaluating your history. Be open about concerns or anxieties you might have regarding dental procedures;

with so many patients experiencing similar feelings, dentists often have strategies to help you feel more comfortable. A good dentist will become a collaborator when making care decisions and be a coach who motivates you. Keep looking until you find the right one.

When Wisdom Teeth Appear

There's actually more to come after the last baby tooth is finally replaced.

A new set of teeth, known as wisdom teeth, emerges later in life — sometimes well after adolescence. These four teeth are situated behind the last visible molar on either side. For some lucky folks, these teeth cause no trouble at all. But they can create havoc if there isn't enough space alongside the existing permanent teeth.

They might push previously straight teeth out of alignment, crowding everything forward. The overcrowding that follows can also bring jaw pain and headaches. Crooked teeth may invite gum disease since they're more difficult to floss around. Wisdom teeth that don't fully break through the gum surface also create an environment where bacteria can grow and that in turn increases the risk of infection and cavities. Impacted wisdom teeth may even form cysts, which can potentially harm the roots of neighboring teeth.

WATCHING OUT

Wisdom teeth generally emerge during the late teens and early 20s, long after childhood teeth have been replaced by permanent ones. Your dentist will track their development through X-rays and decide on the best course of action. If you have sufficient room in your mouth, you



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might experience no discomfort at all. Some people may need to have their wisdom teeth extracted, however, particularly if they're growing in at an angle or causing other complications.

TOOTH EXTRACTION

The extraction process can typically be completed in a

single outpatient visit, depending on positioning within the gums or how deeply the teeth are embedded. Antibiotics will be prescribed before impacted teeth or removed or if there's an infection. The surgery usually involves administering general anesthesia, so you'll likely be asked to refrain from eating or drinking beforehand.

An oral surgeon will remove the teeth, then close the area using stitches.

AFTER CARE

Following surgery, your dentist will provide detailed post-operative care instructions to avoid complications or further treatment. Initially, you'll likely need to bite down

on surgical gauze and replace it periodically as needed. You'll be encouraged to stick to soft foods such as pudding or mild soups for the first few days. Spicy foods should be avoided entirely. Crunchy snacks like nuts or chips pose a risk of reopening surgical wounds and should also be avoided.

Coping with Sensitive Teeth

Do you find it hard to enjoy very hot or cold things? There might be a problem.

Have you noticed a new sensitivity in your teeth? They might be signaling deeper dental issues that go beyond mere discomfort. This reaction could point to underlying problems like worn enamel, gum disease that's exposed tooth roots, or tooth decay. If things only seem to be getting worse, rely on a dentist's trained eye to diagnose and effectively treat the underlying causes.

WHY IT HURTS

Our teeth are shielded by enamel, one of the strongest substances in the human body. However, over time, poor oral hygiene and excessive consumption of acidic foods or beverages can erode this protective layer. Once damaged, the enamel exposes the dentin underneath. This layer is filled with tiny tubes that can transmit temperature changes directly to nerve endings and, when exposed, that leads directly to increased sensitivity. Beneath the gum line, cementum plays a role in protection but can wear away, too. Identifying what aggravates your teeth is a critical first step toward finding relief. Some triggers might be easily avoidable.

PREVENTING SENSITIVITY

If your teeth aren't currently

sensitive, take proactive steps to maintain their health. Brushing gently is critically important. Overdoing it can weaken enamel, causing decay, discoloration and greater sensitivity. Aggressive brushing can harm your gums. For those who already experience sensitivity, try to minimize acidic foods and

beverages. This includes items such as soft drinks, wine, citrus fruits, and certain yogurts. If you can consume these without pain, try to delay brushing afterward or consider drinking milk to neutralize acidity in your mouth. Brushing immediately can worsen enamel erosion. Warm water rinses can also

help soothe sensitive teeth.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

During routine dental visits, discuss any sensitivity concerns with your dentist. Treatment strategies will depend on the severity of your condition and overall oral health. For mild cases, they might suggest over-the-

counter toothpaste specifically designed for sensitivity. Direct application of fluoride can help strengthen your teeth. Pain management therapies are available for moderate discomfort, while severe cases may require advanced procedures like gum grafts or root canals to restore your oral health.



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