

# “New Strategies Can End Fear of Dental Visits”

When I first met Brenda she'd seen a dentist exactly twice in 20 years – once when she fell and smashed a tooth, and once when she was in awful pain from a tooth infection.

It wasn't that she didn't understand how important dental care was to her health. She did. She was simply so afraid of visiting a dentist that she couldn't even think about it, much less actually make and keep an appointment.

It's a serious problem, and one that's a lot more common than you might think. In fact, experts estimate between 9% and 15% of people avoid going to the dentist because of fear and anxiety.<sup>1</sup>— so you may well have a loved one with a problem like Barbara's.

If you do, I'm sure you're concerned.

## Risking Their Smile – And Their Health

You've seen them become ashamed of their smiles – maybe even so embarrassed they've started avoiding social situations. And you suspect they aren't eating well because eating normal meals often hurts.

What's more, you're worried their health is in danger. You know that if someone hasn't seen a dentist in years they probably have at the *very* least early periodontal (gum) infection. And you've read or heard that the American Heart Association says studies support an association between gum disease and atherosclerotic vascular disease<sup>2</sup> and that gum disease can make keeping diabetes under control a lot more difficult.

Those are scary things to think about, but fortunately there is an answer.

## New Hope for Fearful Patients

In fact, there's good news for people like Brenda – because today dentists have strategies to help take away the fear so they can get the care they need. In fact, a tiny, FDA-approved pill, taken before the office visit, can help them lie back, relax and simply drift through treatment.

I've seen this strategy work time and time again, as we help people get past their fears and begin enjoying healthy, beautiful smiles. Often they are so relaxed and comfortable they choose longer appointments so they can get the work they need done more quickly.



## You Can Help

Of course the first step is getting the fearful person to come in for a preliminary consultation – but getting someone who’s terrified to listen isn’t easy. So I’d like to suggest some ways you can help them take that all-important first step.

1. Don’t tell your friend or relative their behavior is irrational. They already know that and feel badly about their fear.
2. Don’t scold or criticize. Offices like ours that specialize in helping fearful patients are careful to keep the conversation positive and focused on how good they’re going to look and feel once their treatment is finished.
3. Tell them that there is safe, gentle medication that can take away their fear both before and during their visit.
4. Encourage them to make a consultation appointment – during which no work will be done – so we can get to know them and plan the best ways to make them comfortable.
5. If possible, come with them to the appointment. Having you there can make it a lot easier for them.

1. [http://my.clevelandclinic.org/services/dental\\_care/hic\\_easing\\_dental\\_phobia\\_in\\_adults.aspx](http://my.clevelandclinic.org/services/dental_care/hic_easing_dental_phobia_in_adults.aspx)
2. <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/125/20/2520>

*Dr. Tarpenning is a dentist at Hebert Dental in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and has authored a book entitled “Get Your Smile On! Your Guide To Extraordinary Dental Care” in 2013.*

*For more information you can reach him at 715-835-0606 or by e-mail at [info@hebertdental.com](mailto:info@hebertdental.com)*

