

Afraid of the dentist?

A RANGE OF SEDATION METHODS CAN HELP PATIENTS PUT ANXIETY TO REST

By Liza N. Burby



Each year, millions of people avoid preventive dental care because of phobias and anxiety. In fact, fear of the dentist kept an estimated 6.8 million adults 35 to 49 years old from getting a dental checkup in the past year, according to the American Dental Association Health Policy Institute.

That sets them up for potential dental problems that can become systemic and make existing health issues, like diabetes, worse, said Dr. Ralph Epstein, a clinical associate professor and director of the dental anesthesiology residency program at the Stony Brook School of Dental Medicine.

It's also given rise to the appeal of sedation dentistry — the use of medication to calm and relax a patient before and during a procedure. People who seem to find it most appealing are those who have a low tolerance for pain, a prior bad experience, trouble sitting still, gag reflex issues or complex dental problems, according to Epstein.

Despite the frequency of advertisements for sedation dentistry and its seemingly increasing popularity, it's not something new, said Dr. Edwin Ginsberg, a partner at North Shore Long Island Periodontics & Implantology in Great Neck. "It's more of a marketing tool to describe dental anesthesia services that have been available to patients for decades for extractions, implants, periodontal treatment, as well as routine restorative dentistry," he said.

Sedation options

Dental sedation is generally available on four levels — minimal, moderate, deep and general anesthesia — and it's "easy to go from one level of sedation into another," Epstein said. It can be administered by having the patient inhale a sedating agent, swallow a pill or liquid or get an intravenous injection.

- **Minimal sedation:** Minimal sedation involves low dosages of such oral medications as Valium or Xanax that relax patients but allow them to breathe on their own and respond to verbal commands and pain, according to Ginsberg, who is also a clinical assistant professor at the Hofstra Northwell School of Medicine in Hempstead. "In higher doses, these same medications may result in a state of moderate sedation or deep sedation," he said. "Nitrous oxide can also be used."

- **Moderate sedation:** Also known as conscious sedation, moderate sedation "is a little deeper, though it's not

"Keep in mind that sedation deals with the fear, not the pain," Epstein said.

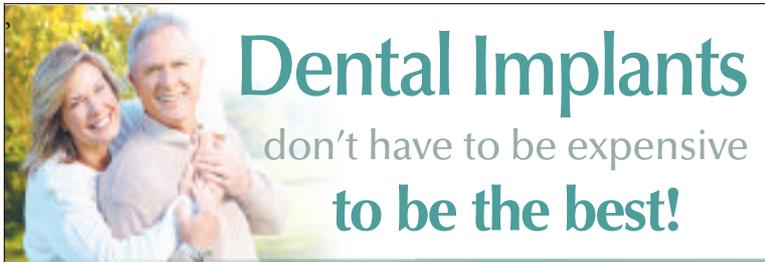
intended for the patient to lose consciousness but help them relax more and have minimal recall of the procedure," said Epstein, who practices at Distinctive Dental Services of New York, in Great Neck. "The patient must be able to respond to verbal commands or light tactile stimulation." Moderate sedation, he said, can be done with oral medication, IV medication with oxygen or with nitrous oxide and oxygen.

Brian Raskin, a practicing dentist and director of Advanced DDS in Garden City, said that the downside of using oral medications for sedation is that patients have to wait about an hour for the medication to take effect, and the dosage can be hard to adjust. "IV is the safest way because, if there's a problem, the doctor has a way to give drugs quickly and can adjust it accordingly," he said.

- **Deep sedation:** Either with additional medication or increased dosages, patients in deep sedation are on the edge of consciousness but can't be easily aroused. "They will, however, respond to repeated or painful stimulation," Ginsberg said. "They may not be able to maintain their own airway so we may have to help with their breathing. They may also get some degree of amnesia so they don't necessarily remember the procedure."

- **General anesthesia:** Use of general anesthesia causes a complete loss of consciousness. The patient doesn't remember the

continued on next page



Dental Implants

don't have to be expensive
to be the best!

- **FREE Dental Implant Consultation**
- **Replace Missing Teeth Permanently**
- **Same Day Teeth**
- **Over 2,000 Implants placed per year**

Senior Citizen Discount
5 percent additional discount
This month Only with this ad!

**Complete
Tooth
Replacement**
SUMMER SPECIAL
Implant, Post, & Crown
\$1,499*

**FINAL DAYS
OF SPECIAL**

NOT VALID FOR WORK PREVIOUSLY STARTED

*Full payment due upon commencing treatment. Implant, post and crown must be completed in our office to qualify for promotional fees. Cannot be combined with any other offer. Must bring ad in at time of free consultation. Mention you saw us in Newsday. VALID JULY 26, 2016 THRU AUG. 18, 2016.

12 Months Interest Free Financing Available



Invisalign®
SPECIAL
Complete Case Only \$3,999

CONTEMPORARY
DENTAL IMPLANT CENTRE®
212.269.9500 • www.cdic.com

25 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

9 Convenient Locations New York & CT:

Nassau County: MASSAPEQUA PARK - 1035 Park Blvd., Suite 1D
VALLEY STREAM - 260 West Sunrise Highway, Suite 201

Suffolk County: SMITHTOWN - 321 East Main Street, Suite 3

UPPER WEST SIDE • 41st & MADISON AVE. • SCARSDALE • REGO PARK • BROOKLYN • STRATFORD (CT)

* Implant, post & crown must be completed at our office to qualify for promotional fees.



procedure and shouldn't need local anesthesia to numb the mouth. Epstein said that "general anesthesia is typically administered by the intravenous route or with potent inhalation agents."

Unlike general anesthesia, he said that minimal, moderate and deep sedation don't replace local injected anesthesia.

"Keep in mind that sedation deals with the fear, not the pain," Epstein said.

What you need to know

• Dental experts agree that choosing a sedation method should be a joint decision made with your dentist and based on the dental procedure you need to have done and your concerns.

• Though Epstein said that all of these methods are considered safe, he noted that some people face a higher risk for complications. They include pregnant women, people who are morbidly obese and those who have obstructive sleep apnea, severe asthma, poorly controlled diabetes or significant heart issues, he said.

• When seeking sedation dentistry, Epstein suggests that, in addition to getting referrals, ask what training the dentist has received in sedation and anesthesia. Also, ask if the dentist has

a New York State certificate to administer the level of sedation or anesthesia you would need. Each type requires different training and monitoring techniques, he said.

• "Further, ask what continuing education they take to keep up-to-date with pharmacology, monitoring and emergency management," he said. "Also, ask if they have a plan to deal with emergencies that includes transport to a hospital."

• Because sedation dentistry allows patients to get work done in a comfortable environment without anxiety, Raskin said, often dentists "can wean them off [sedation] after they have a good experience — so they might be able to get the next procedure without it."