

## CHAPTER 51

# A DREAM VISIT

BY DR. VINCENT MONTICCIOLO

*A smile is the light in your window that tells others that there is a caring, sharing, person inside.*

~ Denis Waitley

Usually, people who delay going to the dentist don't do it out of lack of care for their mouths. Most of the time, the decision to skip dental care is directly related to the fear and anxiety associated with going to the dentist. Over eleven million Americans experience some form of fear or anxiety about going to the dentist. Many patients refrain from taking proper care of their mouths for many reasons. The anticipated pain involved with repairing decayed teeth, the fear of needles, or a "bad" experience in the past. Avoiding the dentist only leads to long-term consequences and more serious issues, including cardiac, respiratory and kidney diseases.

Sedation dentistry is the use of medication to put a patient in a relaxed state while the dentist performs the dental procedure. The sedative drugs help the patient to become free of stress and anxiety, reduce memory of the treatment, and make the dental appointment a much more pleasant experience, especially in the case of invasive treatments. At the same time, sedation makes the procedure easier for the dentist, allowing him to concentrate on performing the dental treatment in the best possible way.

## **THE BENEFITS OF SEDATION DENTISTRY**

The six main benefits of sedation dentistry for the patient and the dentist include the following:

### **1. Relaxation:**

Dental fear and anxiety are estimated to keep 40% of patients away from the dental office. Many more decide to postpone treatment due to dental fear. Sedation dentistry can transform dental visits into a relaxing experience, with the patient relieved from stress and fear.

### **2. Comfort:**

Patients who are about to have a dental treatment can benefit from the increased level of comfort offered through sedation dentistry. By being sedated, you will feel much less tired after a treatment. Patients with temporomandibular (TMJ) problems, jaw soreness, and difficulty keeping their mouth open will have much less discomfort from the treatment.

### **3. Amnesic effect:**

Amnesia is not only a side effect of dental sedation, but also a benefit. After treatment, there will be little to no memory of the dental procedure. The appointment feels as if it lasted only a few minutes, even if it has been several hours. Certain invasive dental procedures, such as multiple extractions or root canals, can be done without remembering the experience. Many patients, especially those with dental anxiety, will be much more relaxed if they can erase these memories with sedation.

### **4. Control of the gag reflex:**

Reducing the gag reflex is another benefit of sedation dentistry. Gagging, especially if it is anxiety-induced, can be managed successfully with sedation dentistry.

### **5. Movement control:**

Sedation minimizes the mobility of the dental patient. This is extremely beneficial in patients with physical or mental medical conditions who have uncontrollable movements. Special needs and medically-compromised patients are able to have all their dental work safely completed while being sedated.

## **6. Fewer Visits:**

Sedation dentistry can help patients tolerate longer appointments comfortably. Thus, fewer appointments are needed. Complex or multiple procedures, that would require many appointments, can be completed in a few or even a single visit. This is a great benefit for patients with time constraints and very tight schedules.

## **RETURNING TO THE DENTIST**

Sedation dentistry offers the opportunity to tackle a number of problems in one visit. After the procedure, patients have no recollection of the appointment, yet all of their dental issues were treated. Marie hadn't been to a dentist in twenty-five years when she came into my practice. Like many patients who stay away that long, her dental health was affecting her overall well-being. Lacking adequate dental insurance and having a bad experience to local anesthesia prevented Marie from following through with treatment. She sought a second opinion and came to my office for consultation and learned the benefits of sedation dentistry. After such a long lapse in visiting a dentist, Marie came in to have a number of problems worked on while she was sedated. She was able to have many of her issues taken care of quickly. The entire experience was a delight, preventing an agonizing process with multiple and painful visits.

It doesn't even take that long for a situation in someone's mouth to deteriorate to the point where it is negatively affecting their health and self-esteem. Halie had only been away from a dentist for two years, but had a low self-esteem, predominately from her smile being riddled with decay. In one visit, she was able to have a bridge to replace missing front teeth and began the road to better oral health.

Instead of it being a scary day, the biggest memory Halie had of her visit was that it was a breeze. Sedation dentistry allows patients to begin to heal again and have better overall health. We are able to provide patients with a better smile without them having any memory of their dental visit. Much can be done in one visit because the sedation relaxes their body response and relieves their anxiety.

## **THE EIGHT PATIENT GROUPS THAT SEDATION DENTISTRY CAN HELP**

### **1. Patients with dental and needle phobia**

Dental and needle phobic patients are considered as the best candidates for having sedation dentistry. People with these phobias will try to avoid, at any cost, not only dental treatment, but even visiting the dentist. They prefer to tolerate severe pain instead of going to the dentist. Whatever the reason that has caused the dental phobia, sedation dentistry can help these patients to get the oral care they need.

### **2. Patients with severe gag reflex**

Some patients have a very sensitive gag reflex. The fear of choking and gagging can turn dental treatment into an agonizing procedure for the patient. The dentist's work is also much more difficult because he must make very careful movements while working. Some procedures, such as working on back teeth or taking impressions, may be almost impossible for patients with a strong reflex. Sedation methods help patients reduce, and possibly eliminate, the gag reflex issue.

### **3. Patients with special needs**

Patients with special needs, such as Autism or Down syndrome, and those with mental challenges may have a greater difficulty in receiving dental care. Following instructions, remaining calm, using less movements, and the inability to understand that the procedure performed is only to benefit them is hard for anyone. Sedation dentistry techniques can help these patients to receive proper dental care.

Also, certain medical conditions can affect the ability of the patient to control his movements. Parkinson's disease, Cerebral Palsy, and other disorders of the central nervous system can cause uncontrolled body movements. These movements can affect the accuracy of the dentist's actions and increase the risk of injury. Sedation dentistry can relax the body muscles reducing movement, allowing the dentist to complete their treatment.

### **4. Patients with time constraints**

Another problem that many patients face is the lack of time to dedicate to multiple and lengthy dental procedures. Sedation dentistry allows for the opportunity to get treatment in a fraction of the time and in much fewer appointments than traditional dentistry. This can be a great benefit

for people with time constraints and inflexible work schedules that would otherwise force them to postpone dental care.

#### **5. Patients who need complex/multiple treatment**

Having to undergo a series of complex and invasive dental procedures, such as extensive gum surgery, implants, or multiple extractions, is never a ‘pleasant’ experience, even for patients without any problem of dental anxiety or physical limitations. Sedation dentistry can help everyone to get the most complex treatments much more comfortably, in a relaxed state, without stress and without feeling exhausted afterwards.

#### **6. Patients with TMJ problems or jaw soreness**

Patients with TMJ disorders can find it difficult to open their mouth wide or keep it open through lengthy treatments. They may also suffer from post-operative jaw soreness for many days after treatment. Dental sedation helps to relax not only the jaw muscles but also reduces the overall tension to the body muscles. This makes the procedure much easier and less tiring for both the patient and the dentist.

#### **7. Patients with sensitive teeth or difficulty getting numb**

Not all people have the same response to the medications given by the dentist for local anesthesia. Some may get numb with a very small amount of anesthetic, while others may not be adequately anesthetized even with a full dose of local anesthetic. Sedation dentistry can increase the effectiveness of local anesthesia by allowing the dentist to titrate the local anesthesia to the proper amount, allowing the patient to become numb.

#### **8. Patients with past traumatic experiences**

Many patients have experienced past traumatic dental visits that have mentally scarred them. Their memory of these appointments has caused an anxiety and fear towards any future dental work. Some of these memories are from their childhood and have increased over the years. Others have had bad recollections of their wisdom teeth or orthodontic extractions. Patients with traumatic pasts, including veterans and domestic violence survivors, would also benefit from the amnesic affect of sedation dentistry.

### **DREAM VISITS – A GENTLE APPROACH TO DENTISTRY**

Sedation dentistry fills a unique niche and can completely transform lives. Patients schedule sedation consultations when they are in pain, losing teeth,

or embarrassed about their smile. We're able to change their lives without the complications, fears, or anxieties related to dental work done while you are awake.

Our practice tries to make your appointment the most comfortable dental visit that patients will ever encounter. We try to create an environment of calmness that starts in the waiting room and continues all the way through to recovery. Since many patients come in after having severe dental phobias, sedation allows for them to have multiple problems taken care of in one sitting. This makes the experience a more positive one, preventing them from worry.

### **WHAT TO EXPECT AT A DREAM VISIT**

A visit to the office for a sedation dentistry session begins with a consultation visit to discuss what is needed. Then, a pre-operative visit is scheduled. The pre-operative visit allows the dental team to explain everything to the patient. Instructions are given, and all the risks and benefits are discussed. The patient's vital signs are taken and all their medical history is reviewed, including the patient's medications. Post-operative instructions are also reviewed at this visit. All questions are answered and consents signed. A mild sedative for the patient to take one hour prior to their sedation appointment may be prescribed. This will relieve their initial stress on the day of their sedation appointment. Also, a caregiver must transport them to and from the office on the day of the procedure.

After the patient arrives on the day of their appointment, the caregiver is taken to a sedation lounge where coffee and tea can be found. The patient is moved to the sedation suite and monitors are placed on the patient. The medication for sedation is then added so an ideal amount can be given to reach the desired effect. The standard medication produces an amnesic effect, so they will have little memory of the experience. If a longer and more advanced procedure is needed, a secondary medication may be added.

The sedation used in conscious dental sedation is different from the general anesthesia used in a hospital setting. It has a twilight effect, which is safe enough to do in an office setting. The patient is still breathing on their own. Intubation would not be needed, as is the case if they were under general anesthesia. Thus, less side effects from sedation are seen.

Once a patient is in a fully-relaxed state, we can begin treatment. Upon completion of all the dental procedures outlined during the consultation, the patient awakens without any negative recollections of their visit. Patients often come out of sedation asking when we will be beginning the procedure. They are always amazed and pleased that all the dental care has been completed.

Each evening after sedation, I call my patients to check on them. One night I called a woman and explained that I was calling to see how she was after the visit. She laughed and said, “You know, I woke up at home and I said to my husband, ‘We have to get to the dentist! We’re late.’ And he told me to look in my mouth – we had already been to the office.” Sedation patients often have this very same experience.

### **MAKING DENTAL HEALTH AN INVESTMENT**

Besides the occasional physical complication, the biggest challenge to sedation dentistry is availability. Every region varies on the amount of dentists who are certified and can perform sedation dentistry. Of course, fewer sedation dentists lead to further dental neglect. It is important that sedation be an option that is available more globally, because it can be the difference between good health and poor health.

Besides availability, cost is a factor. There is an extra cost for sedation dentistry. When compared to doing many separate procedures with traditional general dentistry, the price is cost effective. Sometimes, dental insurance may cover part or all of the fee. Sedation allows for the dental work to be completed in a safe, comfortable, and efficient manner.

### **DENTISTRY THAT’S TRULY A DREAM**

Lori was a patient that hadn’t been to a dentist in five years and was seeing the negative impact on areas of her life. Fear of the dentist, coupled with a sensitive gag reflex, had kept Lori from getting the care that she needed. Eventually, that choice was impacting both her physical health and her self-esteem. Her apprehension had stemmed from one of her first dental appointments when she was a child.

Lori’s dream visit changed her life. In one appointment, the problems in her mouth were able to be addressed for the first time in years. A thorough, and deep cleaning improved her oral health, while she was

soundly resting. After waking up in recovery, Lori not only had a nicer smile, but also had lost her anxiety of the dentist.

Dental health is imperative to overall health and wellness. Sedation dentistry and dream visits are important because they help ease the fears of visiting the dentist, anxiety over the needles, and pain. Instead of a trip to get a tooth treated being a nightmare, sedation offers an alternative that makes the experience positive. It opens the door to better care in the future, and more self-confidence. For patients that are too busy, too scared, or have been suffering quietly for years, it really is a dream come true.





## About Dr. Vincent

Vincent J. Monticciolo, DDS, MBA, JD has a passion for learning that is equal to his passion for helping others. He has created a life where his skills and purpose are combined.

Graduating from the University of Detroit, School of Dentistry, Dr. Monticciolo received many awards and was selected to the Honors Clinical Program. In 2001, he earned his Masters Degree in Business Administration. Also, in 2013, he earned his Law Degree, all while practicing dentistry full time and taking various continuing education courses.

In addition to his family and sedation dentistry practice, Dr. Monticciolo has been driven by opportunities to lead through example, which were first shown in his days as a part-time faculty member at the dental school he'd once attended. Over time, his drive grew into leadership to serve his community, and it was there that everything really fell into place for him.

As inspiration to help struggling individuals who could not afford dental care took shape, Dr. Monticciolo found a way to improve the community he lived in by offering free dental care to a few needy individuals. It was an incredible experience, and Dr. Monticciolo, along with his wife, Dr. Natalie Monticciolo, began to think of how they could take this simple concept and make it grow into something larger. After relocating to the Tampa, Florida area, Dentistry from the Heart was formed in 2001. It has become synonymous with Dr. Monticciolo's energy and efforts to embrace giving back. Since then, Dentistry from the Heart has become a charity that helps coordinate over 250 events in all 50 states, as well as internationally.

Furthermore, in 2012, Dr. Monticciolo started Dental Care Delivered, a mobile dental service that provides care to residents in assisted living facilities and nursing homes around the west coast of Florida. It is another step to ensuring that more people can have the smile they deserve, regardless of their circumstances.

Today, Dr. Monticciolo lives with his wife and two daughters in Palm Harbor, Florida. Aside from his charity work, he enjoys spending quality time with his family and practicing dentistry. He currently practices full time in New Port Richey and Tampa, Florida.

### Honors and Awards:

- Honors graduate at dental school
- Academy of General Dentistry Outstanding Student Award
- Comprehensive Dentistry Award

- Frances B. Vedder Society Crown and Bridge Prosthodontics Award
- Omicron Kappa Upsilon (National Dental Honor Society)
- Alpha Sigma Nu (National Jesuit Honor Society)
- Class President in dental school

Memberships and Societies:

- American Dental Society
- Florida Dental Society
- West Pasco Dental Society
- American Society of Dental Anesthesiology
- Society for Special Care Dentistry
- Academy of Dentistry for Persons with Disabilities
- American Society for Geriatric Dentistry
- Florida Health Care Association

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