

AFRAID OF THE DENTIST?

I had a new patient come into the office last week who had not been to the dentist in 17 years. It was her New Year's resolution. Patients rarely admit that it has been that long since they have been to the dentist. They either fear that we are going to scold them or that they will have so many problems they will have to have a mouth full of fillings and crowns. As with almost every patient with this fear, the visit had a happy ending.

When I told her that she only had one small cavity and no periodontal problems, she was so relieved and excited. I did not expect her reaction--I felt like a game show host. Her reaction renewed my appreciation of how fearful the visit can be, even though some patients are very good at hiding their fear.

Telling someone there is nothing to fear doesn't usually help, and most people admit their fears are completely irrational. Most of the "old-school" dentists have retired by now, and most of the dentists today realize they need to make you comfortable if you are ever going to come back regularly. Go onto the Internet, and find out how many dentists "cater to cowards."

Or call the office and ask what they can do to help you overcome your fear. If the office emphasizes anxiety-reducing methods, the person answering the phone should be glad to tell you about what they can do for you and make a note for everyone to be aware of your anxiety when you arrive. The whole staff usually takes great pride in converting the fearful patient into an excited patient.

There are many reasons to give modern dentistry a chance, and remember it's never too late to start a "New Year."

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