

# HYPNODONTICS: HYPNOSIS IN A DENTAL SETTING

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**Hypnodontics** is the art and science of using hypnosis to induce comfortable and pain free dental visits. Hypnosis is used to reduce stress and induce anesthesia so that less medication is used. Hard to manage patients often present the majority of problems the dentist encounters in their daily routine. They take extra time and require special consideration by the dentist and the staff. Hard to manage patients often put off going to the dentist until the pain or dental problem can no longer be ignored. There are numerous reasons why these patients are fearful, tense, nervous and anxious before, during, and even after the dental visit. These patients will complain of extreme anxiety prior to a simple check-up and repeatedly request tranquilizers to help them cope. Hypnosis can easily alleviate the tension, nervousness and unreasonable fear of pain often exhibited by these patients. The hypnotherapist should meet with this type of dental patient two or three days prior to the scheduled dental appointment.

One of the most troublesome problems that a patient may bring to the dentist is that of gagging as soon as anything is inserted into the mouth. Ordinarily this gagging response will occur only if the object is inserted deep into the mouth and into the throat. It is a natural reflex governed by the vagus nerve (cranial nerve 11) to protect against choking. The trigger lies so deep that the reflex does not normally affect the person who is having dental work. For some people, this trigger has moved forward through conditioning to the lips, or the tongue, or some other area touched in the dental examinations. Unless controlled, the gagging can make dental procedures difficult or impossible.

Control can be achieved in many cases by direct suggestion or properly developed imagery, but sometimes more complex methods are required. Waking hypnosis is a very effective means to completely eliminate the gag reflex. There are two basic techniques that are used, both being equally effective. They must be used with complete authority using the power of suggestion. The suggestion must not be objectionable to the patient. The first procedure involves the use of a pen or pencil which the therapist or dentist must place in the patient's hand. The therapist must state with authority, "I am now going to place this pencil in your hand and I want you to keep a steady but gentle pressure on this pencil and continue to do so. As long as you do so, you will no longer have the desire to gag." These continued suggestions can help if you feel it is necessary for your client, "as you continue to hold this pencil, I want you to visualize, picture, or imagine that as the dentist is putting something into your mouth, and as he does so, you will feel calm and relaxed at all times."

The second procedure is also used with complete authority. The therapist or dentist can simply tell the patient to "look between my eyes and I will count from 5 to 1. By the time I get to one, your need to gag will completely disappear." It is the use of the authority

figure, doctor-patient relationship or therapist-patient relationship that is the key for this technique to work.

Sometimes the client needs a post-hypnotic suggestion so that they will be able to relax as soon as they sit down in the dental chair or lounge. Give strong and positive end result imagery suggestions. These suggestions should reinforce how relaxed they feel.

**In summary the uses of hypnosis for dental patients:**

1. Elimination of the patient's tension, anxiety or fear of pain and related discomfort.
2. Accustoming the patient to orthodontic or prosthetic appliances after the patient has agreed to accept them.
3. Maintenance of the patient's comfort during long and arduous periods of dental work.
4. Modification of unwanted dental habits, such as bruxism, the unconscious grinding of teeth.
5. Reduction of anesthesia or analgesia during dental procedures.
6. Substitution for, or in combination with, medication for general anesthesia.
7. Prevention of gagging and nausea.
8. Control of salivary flow.
9. Control of bleeding.

*An excellent reference on this subject is from Postoperative analgesia, Visualization and Guided Imagery for Pain Management R. D. Longacre. Kendall/Hunt. 1995 p. 95-96.*

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