



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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New Services May Help Millions Manage Dental Anxiety *Services include full-body massages, virtual reality eyewear*

Ankeny, IA (April 29, 2009) -- Millions of Americans dread visiting the dentist. In fact, an estimated 30 to 40 million¹ avoid going to the dentist because of anxiety or fear. In conjunction with Mental Health Month in May, Delta Dental wants to raise awareness about a mental condition that affects so many Americans – dental phobia.

“Avoiding the dentist because of fear or phobia may cause an individual’s minor untreated dental problems to develop into severe oral health conditions and in rare cases even death,” says Ed Schooley, DDS, dental director for Delta Dental of Iowa. “It is unfortunate that these individuals may not be receiving the dental care they need. Regular dental cleanings, exams and x-rays and dental treatment services recommended by your dentist are vital to good oral health.”

There are many reasons why people develop dental phobia. The most common cause is a traumatic dental experience. Also, children are often influenced by their parents' fears and squeamish attitudes towards dental treatment. Dental phobia may involve fear of dentists, dental procedures, needles or situations that remind the sufferer of a phobic situation. The dentist's drill is often a major factor in these fears.

“People should share their concerns with their dentist or dental hygienist,” says Schooley. “The dental team will determine the best way to make the exam more comfortable.”

If your dentist does not take your fear seriously, you may need to find a dentist who better understands dental phobia. There are ways to work with a dentist to reduce anxiety. For instance, ask your dentist to explain what is happening during every stage of the exam. Another strategy is to establish a hand signal to let the dentist know when to take a break.

Increasingly, more dental offices offer services that help patients manage their anxiety,

including:

- Hand and full-body massages.
- Massaging dental chairs.
- Paraffin hand waxes.
- Relaxation techniques – such as breathing exercises.
- Virtual reality eyewear.
- Headsets with music or calming nature sounds.

Other options for extreme dental anxiety and pain reduction include forms of sedation via medications that are administered intravenously, orally or through inhalation such as nitrous oxide. Since there are risks associated with these various approaches to sedation and anesthesia, talk to your dentist about any special state permit or training program governing these services and which therapy is right for you.

Delta Dental of Iowa is the largest and most experienced provider of dental benefits in the state. As a not-for-profit, Delta Dental of Iowa invests in oral health projects through the Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation that focuses on access to care, prevention, education and research. The Iowa company is a member of the Delta Dental Plans Association, a national organization of not-for-profit Delta Dental plans. The national association is the largest dental benefits carrier in the nation providing coverage to more than 51 million people in nearly 93,000 employer groups.

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¹Krochak, Dr. Michael. “What is Dental Phobia?” Dentalfear.net. 2008.
<http://www.dentalfear.net/whatis.html>