



# IMPRESSIONS

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## Overcoming Dental Anxiety

If you hate the thought of going to the dentist, you're not alone. Dental fear or dental anxiety (DFA) is real, and affects nearly half of the population. Fear of the dentist serves as a significant barrier to receiving regular dental care. Knowing the relationship between oral health and overall health, skipping out on important preventive or restorative treatment in the dental chair can harm your health.

Gum disease is a serious infection and a constant state of inflammation in the mouth can affect other parts of the body. Research indicates a link between gum disease and systemic conditions including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes, in addition to poorer health outcomes in general. Cavities have proven to be fatal in more than a few cases around the world. So, why exactly do people fear the dentist and how can this fear be managed to avoid serious health problems?

- **Vicarious Learning.** Nearly half of those surveyed who are dentally anxious report that their fear started in childhood, often times before a personal and direct dental experience even occurred. This is a result of indirect learning from role models, such as family members or peers, or external sources such as the media, that instills a fear of the dentist. Studies confirm that there is a significant relationship between child and parental fear, so it's no surprise that parents with DFA inherently cast their behaviors and attitudes toward the dentist onto their offspring.

**What to do:** Keep it positive. When your child asks about the dentist for the first time, explain what happens there in an upbeat way. Avoid talking to your child about negative experiences you may have had. Get them excited and reassure them that there is nothing to fear. This sets the stage for a positive mental experience and increases the likelihood that the child will be receptive to care.

**Tip:** Tour the office before the day of your child's appointment. Many offices have children's areas or rooms with popular character themes. Check out any games in the waiting room, or let your child see how fun it is when the hygienist squirts the air/water syringe.

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## Overcoming Dental Anxiety (cont.)

- **Past Trauma.** Adults and children alike need only one adverse dental experience to set them up for dental anxiety that can last a lifetime. A negative experience with a procedure or dental staff creates a fixed expectation of pain and distress. Childhood dental trauma can carry into adulthood and parental fear affects childhood fear. It is important that direct traumatic experiences be mitigated in a healthy way.

**What to do:** Just as negative experiences condition the brain in a negative way, positive experiences can condition the brain in a positive way. If your child has had a negative dental experience, read books or watch shows that depict positive dental experiences. Similarly, adults can research and read on how dentistry has progressed since they were children, and how some of the treatment methods used historically have evolved to be virtually pain free.

**Tip:** Talk to your dental office ahead of time about DFA in you or your child so that they can go above and beyond to make you comfortable and at ease during your visit.

- **Genetic Traits.** People with certain personality traits such as neuroticism and introversion are naturally more likely to experience dental anxiety. Another genetic component in DFA is gender, as it is shown to be higher in girls than in boys. Cognitive ability also plays a role. Studies suggest that those with a high verbal intelligence suffer from less dental anxiety. This may be the result of being able to express and communicate anxious feelings to dental staff during a dental visit and to understand the coping strategies recommended for stressful situations.

**What to do:** Talk to people about your fears or concerns prior to your dental visit. Sometimes it helps getting support and coping techniques from others with the same fear, and other times it is good to talk to someone without any fear of the dentist who can offer encouragement and rationale. While you can't change your genetic disposition, bringing a comfort object or a distraction with you like a tablet or headphones, considering in-office sedation or safe anti-anxiety medication, and asking your dental team lots of questions can help make your visit less stressful.

**Tip:** If communication is challenging, bringing a buddy to help convey distress during the appointment can be helpful.

- **Invasive Dental Treatment:** Dental appointments requiring fillings, anesthesia, or extractions often serve as the root of dental anxiety. Invasive dental treatment is almost always the cause of DFA in children. The best way to avoid dental fear and anxiety is to help your child have a healthy mouth. Children who experience more check-up visits before they experience their first curative treatment (i.e. fillings or extractions) report low levels of dental fear. This suggests that the longer the child continues to have a positive experience when visiting the dentist, the less likely they are to become dentally fearful whenever they do eventually have a negative experience.

**Tip:** Start taking your child to the dentist by age 1. The dental team will offer valuable counsel on taking care of your child's teeth, which will keep your child from getting cavities and avoid the need for any invasive dental treatment during a young age.

An individual's oral health has a significant impact on their physical and mental well-being. Since dental fear and anxiety negatively impacts dental attendance, it negatively impacts a person's quality of life. DFA can be a complex and multi-factorial condition, unique to a person's individual experiences and make-up. Talk to your doctor and dentist about how to best manage your dental fear and anxiety. It can change your life and the life of your children, as well.



Source: Getty Images

## Don't Wait For Pain: Schedule Your Dental Appointment Now

Unfortunately, many people wait until a tooth hurts to make an appointment with the dentist — or on the flip side, they think their teeth and mouth are in good health just because nothing is hurting. In actuality, pain is sometimes a terrible indicator of whether or not issues are present, and often times, by the time pain is present, the treatment required is far more complicated and expensive. Here's why you should see the dentist regularly and not wait for pain to motivate you to schedule.

- **Gum disease.** Gum disease has proven to be a threat to the mouth and overall health, as harmful bacteria infect the gums and travel to other parts of the body. While some people see blood when brushing or flossing, they may not have actual pain from their gum disease until it is so progressed that tooth roots are exposed, causing sensitivity and loose teeth.
- **Cavities.** Bacteria in our mouths mixes with sugar in the foods we eat to cause our teeth to break down and get cavities. However, this is a progress that sometimes takes a while. While cavities are small, they are simple to fix and some may not even require anesthesia. On the other hand, the larger a cavity gets, the more likely it is that the tooth will require root canal therapy, which is far more expensive and time consuming than a simple filling. Even cavities that don't hurt can be severe, spreading infection to the bloodstream and becoming life threatening. Good oral hygiene and regular dental exams are the best defense against complicated and dangerous tooth decay.
- **TMJ Disorders.** Pain caused by your teeth or jaw can actually present as pain somewhere else. This can happen often with temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders. The TMJ acts as a sliding hinge between your jawbone and your skull, and it can become injured or inflamed. Pain from TMJ can be felt as headaches, neck pain, back pain, ear pain or other ear issues like tinnitus or vertigo. While you may not have pain in a tooth, your teeth could be the source of pain you are feeling other places in your body. A trip to the dentist can solve problems that trips to your regular doctor may not.



Source: Getty Images

**The pain can come too late.** Best and easy treatment is more likely when problems are found early. Late stage cavities can require root canals or even extractions. In addition to cavities, oral cancer can cause lesions in the mouth that might go unnoticed until pain is present. When detected early by a dentist or dental hygienist, oral cancer is easily treatable and highly beatable.

**Schedule your appointment this summer.** Letting your health be guided by pain is a harmful approach to both mouth and body health. Be proactive and schedule dental check-ups for yourself and your family this summer, when busy schedules tend to open up. While kids are out of school, it's easier for parents to make appointments that fit their schedules and allows for visits before the back to school rush in the fall. Summer is a great time for older kids who need braces to get adjusted to the new look and feel of their orthodontics. It's also a great time for high school and college students to get their wisdom teeth removed, allowing time for post-surgery healing and recovery without missing time from school.

**It may take longer to get a dental appointment than it used to.** This is because in many practices, the COVID-19 pandemic has enhanced infection control practices and screening protocols, making less appointments available each day. Call now to get the next available appointment and get a head start on unmasking your best smile.



Source: Getty Images

## Tooth Fairies From Around the Globe

Regardless of where they're from, one thing that children from all around the world have in common is that their primary (baby) teeth will start to fall out around age 6. What better way to get a child excited about losing a tooth than the promise of a prize from a magical fairy in exchange? For many in the United States, when a tooth falls out, a child excitedly places it under his or her pillow, and the next day, cash or a prize is mysteriously found in its place. However, not all cultures recognize this winged-fairy as the one responsible for the tooth treasures. Read on to see how other parts of the world recognize the loss of a baby tooth.

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## Tooth Fairies From Around the Globe (cont.)

### Anna Bogle

In Ireland, a young leprechaun girl named called Anna Bogle takes the place of the tooth fairy. The story goes that Anna was playing in the forest one day and accidentally knocked out her front tooth. She is very unhappy about this and desperately searches for a new tooth to put back in its place. She gets the idea to steal a human child's tooth, however, leprechauns are not thieves. So, she takes the teeth but she leaves behind a piece of "gold" in exchange.



Source: Getty Images

### Tooth Tissues

In Ukraine, children wrap their lost tooth in a tissue and find a dark corner of the house to place it. They whisper "Take my old tooth and give me a new one," and the tooth is left in the corner until a new tooth grows in its place.

### To the Dogs

In Mongolia, it's customary to wrap the lost teeth in meat and feed them to the household pet. It is believed that in doing so, adult teeth will grow in and be just as strong as the teeth of the bone-eating dog. If a family has no pet, children bury their teeth in the ground, next to a tree, in the hopes that adult teeth will have strong roots.

### Fortune Toothers

They do not have a tooth fairy in Turkey, but they do unique things with baby teeth when they fall out. They believe a child's tooth holds the child's future within it. They take baby teeth that have fallen out and bury them in places or inside of things that they want manifested in the child's future. For example, if the parents want their child to be a great soccer player, they may bury the tooth on a soccer field. If they want their child to be a dentist, they will bury the tooth outside a dentist's office.

Tooth "fairy" traditions are recorded in writings as early as the 13th century and don't always have to involve cash or prizes. No matter how you choose to recognize the loss of a baby tooth, simple traditions or new practices make great memories for children during their tooth-losing years of 6 to 12 and help them to understand how special and important their teeth are.

### EL RATONCITO PEREZ AND LA PETITE SOURIS.

In some countries, they have a tooth mouse. Spanish-speaking countries such as Spain, Guatemala, and Mexico receive coins in exchange for teeth from El Ratoncito Perez (also known as Raton Miguelito). In France and Switzerland, La Petit Souris (Little Mouse) collects the baby teeth of children. Other countries like Argentina also have a tooth mouse, but instead of putting the tooth under a pillow, children place it in a glass of water and wait for a coin to take its place by morning. Children of other countries that celebrate this mythical mouse believe if they put their tooth under their pillow, the mouse won't trade it for money or a prize, but it will guarantee that the new tooth grows in strong and healthy.



Source: Getty Images

### Beavers and Trees

The American Indian tribes celebrate losing a tooth in many different ways. The Cherokee Indian children would run around the house with the tooth and throw it on the roof while saying, "Beaver, put a new tooth in my jaw!" four times. The children of the Dene Yellowknives, give the lost tooth to their mother or grandmother, who puts the tooth in a tree. Then the family dances around the tree to encourage the tooth to grow in as straight as the trunk.

### Slippers

In South Africa, children believe in and expect the tooth fairy to give them a prize for their lost tooth, however, instead of placing it under their pillow at bedtime, they put it inside of their slippers.

## The Truth About Fluoride

Fluoride is a mineral that occurs naturally in food and water. Studies show fluoride has several health benefits such as strengthening bone density and hardening tooth enamel to protect teeth from decay. It is added to a variety of dental products, such as toothpaste and mouthwash, and is recommended by the American Dental Association as an important part of an oral hygiene routine. It can also be given in drop or tablet form to children. In many places, fluoride is also added to the community water supply. Many research studies have proven the safety and benefits of fluoridated water. For 75 years, people in the United States have been drinking water with added fluoride and enjoying the benefits of better dental health. Drinking fluoridated water keeps teeth strong and reduces cavities (also called tooth decay) by about 25% in children and adults.

Despite these facts, myths regarding fluoride, particularly in terms of the water supply, convey negative and concerning information and are easy to find on the internet and social media. Although much of this information is not based on fact, it causes apprehension regarding the effectiveness and safety of fluoride use. For this reason, it is important that people educate themselves to better separate myth from actual fact for the health of their bodies and especially, their teeth.

- Myth: People who drink fluoridated water develop fluorosis.

**Fact:** Fluorosis, a mild discoloration of teeth, occurs when a person takes in very high amounts of fluoride. In the United States, the amount of fluoride that is added to drinking water is at a level that comes with a very low likelihood of fluorosis. Although some rare cases can be found in the U.S., they are typically very mild.

- Myth: Drinking fluoridated water causes cancer.

**Fact:** Numerous studies and research have shown that the addition of fluoride does not increase the risk of cancer or other serious health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, or kidney problems. It is endorsed as being safe by both the Institute of Medicine and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

- Myth: Fluoride closes a person's Third Eye. The Third Eye is an energy center located in the middle of your forehead. It is also called the "Inner Eye" or the "Mind's Eye," because the Third Eye is as an invisible eye that allows you to see beyond your ordinary vision.



Source: Getty Images

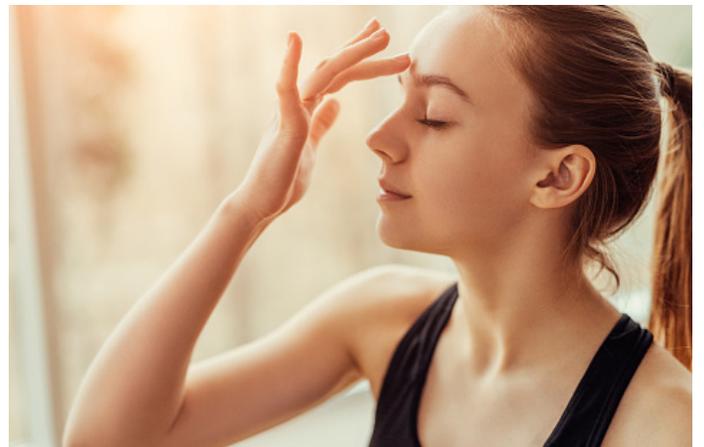
**Fact:** The Third Eye is directly related to the pineal gland, and the closing of the third eye represents calcification of the pineal gland. The best available scientific evidence indicates that water fluoridation and long-term exposure to fluoride is not an indicator for elevated levels of calcium in the pineal gland.

- Myth: Fluoride is dangerous for children

**Fact:** Fluoride is not considered a danger to children when used as intended. Drinking fluoridated water not only helps to strengthen teeth as they grow, but it can also help prevent future tooth decay and loss.

- Myth: It is extremely expensive for communities to fluoridate water.

**Fact:** Fluorosis, a mild discoloration of teeth, occurs when a person takes in very high amounts of fluoride. In the United States, the amount of fluoride that is added to drinking water is at a level that comes with a very low likelihood of fluorosis. Although some rare cases can be found in the U.S., they are typically very mild.



Source: Getty Images

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## The Truth About Fluoride (cont.)

● **Myth:** Fluoridated water does not have an impact on tooth decay.

**Fact:** Numerous studies in the U.S. and Europe show fluoridation helps reduce tooth decay among adults and children.

● **Myth:** Europe does not allow fluoridated water, which means the U.S. shouldn't, either.

**Fact:** European countries do have water fluoridation systems in place. Salt fluoridation is the common method that is used in Europe and also in Latin America.

● **Myth:** Fluoride is a medication that is forced on communities.

**Fact:** The fluoride that is used to fluoridate water is not a medicine. A U.S. court decision ruled that fluoride is a nutrient and not a medication. Water that has been fortified with fluoride is similar to fortifying salt with iodine, milk with vitamin D, and orange juice with vitamin C — none of which are medications.

● **Myth:** The risk of autism is increased by fluoride use.

**Fact:** No evidence from research or studies indicate that the risk of autism is elevated because of fluoride or fluoridated water.



Source: Getty Images



Source: Getty Images

● **Myth:** Fluoridated water is not necessary because of the fluoride in toothpaste.

**Fact:** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the amount of fluoride in toothpaste doesn't provide the level of protection needed to fight tooth decay. Combined, fluoridated water and toothpaste provide maximum protection.

● **Myth:** Fluoride is unnatural.

**Fact:** Certain levels of fluoride can be found naturally in water and other sources. Fluoridation only increases fluoride levels in water and other sources to help decrease decay.

These facts are supported by over 400 credible scientific articles, as referenced within the document below. The hope is for people to make sound choices for themselves and their families regarding the use of fluoride-based on generally accepted, peer-reviewed science, and not on internet urban myths. Fluoride is often called "nature's cavity fighter," and for a good reason.

## Learn More About Fluoridation

[http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Files/Fluoridation\\_Facts.pdf?la=en](http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Files/Fluoridation_Facts.pdf?la=en)