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DENTAL VISITS ARE NO LONGER A PAIN; [SPORTS FINAL Edition]

DR. ROCK POSITANO SPECIAL TO THE NEWS. *New York Daily News*. New York, N.Y.: Oct 6, 2002. pg. 42

Full Text (344 words)

Copyright Daily News, L.P. Oct 6, 2002

Traditionally, going to the dentist meant getting a shot of Novocain and then subjecting your teeth to a high-pitched drill. It also meant walking around with numbness and not being able to eat anything for a couple of hours.

Today, a more comfortable approach is available. A new hydrokinetic process painlessly washes away decay with laser- energized water droplets.

Hydrokinetic energy is produced by combining a spray of atomized water with laser energy. This removes a wide range of tissue, including enamel, dentin, cavities and soft tissue - precisely and painlessly.

In contrast to traditional rotary dental drills, the laser does not create frictional heat, the cause of most discomfort in the past. "Since this laser-hydrokinetic-cutting does not transmit heat or vibration, most dental procedures can be performed without the need for anesthesia," says Dr. Sandip Sachar, a Manhattan cosmetic dentist and member of the Academy of General Dentistry.

Also available today is a soft-tissue diode laser, which sterilizes, cauterizes and seals off nerve endings while cutting - banishing bleeding, pain or post-op swelling. It is commonly used for soft-tissue biopsies and treatment of herpetic lesions and canker sores.

An estimated 98% of patients treated with the laser reported no discomfort during the procedure in a randomized, double-blind clinical trial conducted at the University of the Pacific in San Francisco. No anesthesia was used.

"Dental fear is real, and it is introduced at a very young age," says Sachar. "This has resulted in nearly 50% of the U.S. population not seeing a dentist routinely, resulting in periodontal problems and premature loss of teeth." She firmly believes lasers will turn even "dental phobics" into regular visitors to the dentist..

In the hands of a trained dentist, the laser is a safe medical device. It provides pinpoint accuracy, reducing the chance of causing damage to healthy tissue. The primary safety measure necessary during laser treatment is proper protective glasses for the dentist - and the patient.

Dr. Rock Positano, M.S., M.P.H., D.P.M., is on the faculty and staff of the Weill Medical College of Cornell University.

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