



Tooth Talk

“Hey Doc, I am SCARED of going to the dentist!!! Can you help me? (Part 2)”

Out of all the modalities for sedation in the dental profession, inhalation sedation, also known as “Nitrous Oxide” or “Laughing Gas”, is the most common. In fact, Nitrous Oxide has been in use for over 160 years for relaxation during dental visits!!

Nitrous Oxide is the lightest form of dental sedation. It provides mostly minimal sedation to the patients.

Patients are required to wear a nose mask in order to breathe in Nitrous Oxide. This pleasant smelling and colourless gas has the effect of eliminating pain, and bringing on a warm and desirable feeling.

Nitrous oxide can take effect in just a few minutes after patients inhale it. It can induce warm and tingling sensations in the body, especially in the extremities, and feelings of happiness. These effects will depend on the concentration of Nitrous Oxide, and the amount of time for which the patients are sedated. The Nitrous Oxide that patients receive actually contains at least 30% of Oxygen, with the ratio being 70% Nitrous Oxide at the highest level.

The advantages of Nitrous Oxide are as follows:

- 1) Fast action- Nitrous Oxide takes effect very rapidly, usually in just a few minutes.
- 2) Flexible duration- It can be used to determine the exact time span for which sedation is needed.
- 3) Patient-Dentist communication- With Nitrous Oxide usually providing minimal sedation, patients are conscious and can communicate with the dentist and respond to instructions and the protective reflexes are maintained.
- 4) Adjustable sedation level- Nitrous Oxide can be administered in incremental doses until patients reach the desired level of sedation. There is minimal risk of overdose.
- 5) Fast recovery/No need for an escort- Nitrous Oxide is expelled from the body within a few minutes after the supply of gas is terminated. There are no lingering after effects and no drowsiness after the procedure. Patients can drive home safely afterwards.
- 6) No shots- Sometimes, Nitrous Oxide can make patients calm enough for treatments without the need for needles.
- 7) Pain control- Nitrous Oxide also has pain relieving properties, although these can vary from case to case, and person to person.
- 8) Safety- Nitrous Oxide has been found to have few side effects, and is safe to use.
- 9) Lower cost than other modalities of sedation
- 10) Suitable for most adults and children.

However, Nitrous Oxide does have its disadvantages/limitations:

- 1) Mild pain control only- It may not be a substitute for local anaesthetics injection during more invasive dental procedures.
- 2) Minimal/Light sedation only- It may not be enough for extremely dental phobic patients.
- 3) Nausea/Vomiting- Increased dose of Nitrous Oxide can cause nausea/vomiting if patients have full stomach.
- 4) Mask wear- Nitrous Oxide may not be suitable for “claustrophobic” patients due to the mask covering the nose.
- 5) Patients with respiratory problems- Nitrous Oxide is not indicated for people with respiratory problems or difficulty breathing through their noses.
- 6) Lack of post-treatment pain control- Nitrous Oxide can't help for post-treatment pain control as its pain relieving action is lost in a few minutes after the gas is stopped.

In summary, Nitrous Oxide is very safe but it provides mostly minimal sedation only. The effectiveness of Nitrous Oxide really depends on the anxiety level of the patients. Patients, therefore, should consult with their dentists first prior to their treatment as to whether Nitrous Oxide alone is sufficient enough to provide a comfortable and a relaxing environment for the work to be done.



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