



Tooth Talk

“Hey Doc, I am SCARED of going to the dentist!!! Can you help me? (Part 1)”

If you are afraid of going to the dentist, you are not alone! Fear is one of the main reasons people avoid visiting the dentist. Even patients who see the dentists on a regular basis can find their visits stressful.

Fear of dentistry can be due to:

- bad dental experience in the past
- fear of needles or pain or the sound of the drill
- difficulty with opening the mouth wide
- strong gag reflex
- sensitive teeth
- etc.

Nowadays, with the availability of sedation dentistry, fear of visiting the dentist can be a thing of the past! Sedation dentistry refers to the use of pharmacological agents to calm and relax a patient prior to and during a dental appointment. The pharmacological agents, called sedatives, exert their action by depressing the central nervous system, specifically those areas concerned with “conscious awareness”.

There are different degrees of central nervous system depression, each corresponding to a level of relaxation which ranges from minimal, moderate, to deep sedation:

- a) minimal sedation- patients have reduced anxiety but can readily respond to verbal or physical stimulation
- b) moderate sedation- patients are even more relaxed and will respond to purposeful stimulation
- c) deep sedation- patients may not exhibit any signs of consciousness and therefore be unresponsive to stimulation.

Sedation by pharmacologic methods may be obtained by 2 general routes:

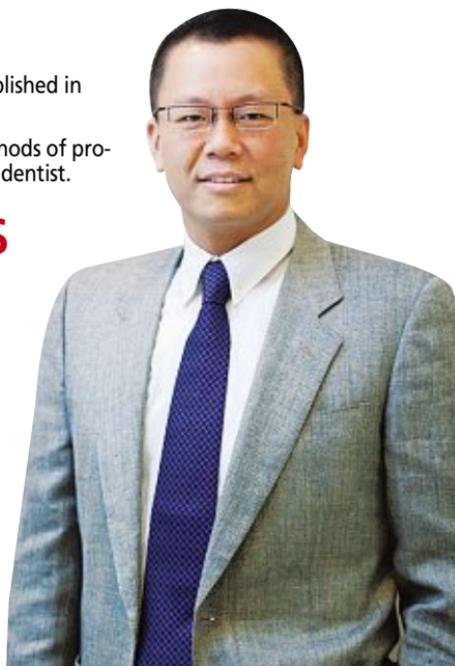
- a) enteral route- involves absorption of medication across membranes from the oral cavity, through the digestive tract, ending in the rectum (the alimentary canal)
 - includes medications that are either swallowed, absorbed through the lining of the oral cavity, or inserted rectally
- b) parenteral route- involves the administration of sedative drugs other than absorption across the membranes of the alimentary canal
 - includes intravenous(IV), inhalation, intramuscular (IM), submucosal, among others.

Sedation dentistry has become very popular because it offers the following benefits for the patients:

- increased patient comfort and relaxation
- little or no memory of treatment (amnesia)
- control of gag reflex
- movement control
- decreased pain sensitivity
- time saving- allowing dental treatment to be accomplished in fewer visits, sometimes as little as one visit -etc.

In the upcoming articles, we shall discuss the different methods of providing sedation to patients who are nervous of visiting the dentist.

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