



Sedation Dentistry: Can you really relax in the dentist's chair?

Does the thought of having your teeth cleaned make your entire body tense with fear? Would you rather endure a toothache than step foot in a dentist's office? You are not alone. A lot of people are so afraid of going to the dentist that they prefer not to have any treatment at all and their condition can get worse. For these patients, sedation dentistry may take away some of the anxiety. Sedation can be used for everything from surgical procedures to dental cleanings. However, its use depends on the individual.

What is sedation dentistry?

Sedation dentistry uses medicine to help patients relax during dental procedures. It is sometimes referred to as "conscious sedation, twilight sedation, or sleep dentistry," although that is not entirely accurate. Patients are usually awake except for those who are under general anesthesia.

Levels of sedation:

- *Minimal sedation* – you are awake but relaxed - this is NOT for the patient that wants to be "out."
- *Moderate sedation* (also called "conscious sedation") - you may slur your words when speaking and not remember much of the procedure. May still be awake with moderate sedation – this is NOT for the patient that wants to be "out."
- *Deep sedation* – you are on the edge of consciousness but can still be awakened. Many times, IV sedation is ideal for most procedures but may not be enough for those with a high tolerance to sedatives or who need to be completely "out" due to their anxiety or dental phobia.
- *General anesthesia* – you are completely unconscious - for the patient that wants to be "out."

Types of sedation used in dentistry:

1. Inhaled Minimal Sedation. You breathe nitrous oxide – otherwise known as "laughing gas" combined with oxygen through a mask that is placed over your nose. The gas helps you relax. Your dentist can control the amount of nitrous oxide you receive, and the gas tends to wear off quickly. This is the only form of sedation where you will be able to drive yourself home after the procedure.
2. Oral Sedation. Depending on the total dose given, oral sedation can range from minimal to moderate. For minimal sedation, you take a medication by mouth. Typically, the medication is Halcion (triazolam), which is a member of the same drug family as Valium, and it is usually taken about an hour before the procedure. The pill makes you drowsy, although you will still be awake. A larger dose may be given in hopes of producing moderate sedation. This is the type of anesthesia most commonly associated with sedation dentistry. Some people become groggy enough from moderate oral sedation to fall asleep during the procedure. They usually can be awakened with a gentle shake. **For the very nervous patient, this is not enough.**
3. IV Moderate Sedation. You receive the sedative drug through a vein, so it goes to work more quickly. This method is often combined with oral sedation and allows the ability to continually adjust the level of sedation as needed. We typically use versed and also fentanyl as needed through the IV. **For the patient that wants to be out, this is not enough.**
4. Deep Sedation and General Anesthesia. You will get medications that will make you either almost unconscious or totally unconscious – deeply asleep during the procedure. While you are under general anesthesia, you cannot easily be awakened until the effects of the anesthesia wear off or are reversed with medication. This can only be performed by an anesthesiologist in office or at the Manatee Surgical Center. **This always achieves the best results** by allowing us to effectively treat you.

Regardless of which type of sedation you receive, you will also get a local anesthetic – numbing medication at the site while we are working in your mouth so that you will not feel any pain or discomfort.

Who can have sedation at the office?

Sedation is most appropriate for people with a real fear or anxiety that is preventing them from going to the dentist. Sedation dentistry may also be appropriate for people who:

- Are nervous about dental procedures
- Have a low pain threshold
- Cannot sit still in the dentist’s chair
- Have very sensitive teeth
- Have a very bad gag reflex
- Need a large amount of dental work completed

Sometimes, children are given sedation if they are terrified of going to the dentist or refuse to cooperate during the visit. Nitrous oxide tends to be safe in children, and just about any dentist can administer it. A smaller percentage of pediatric dentists are trained to give children oral sedation. Oral sedation can be safe when kept within the recommended dose for the child’s age and weight. Our doctors also have access to a pediatric anesthesiologist that can come to our office for special circumstances. They bring hospital-grade experience directly into the office to provide the safest and most comfortable environment for your child so that our doctors can effectively treat your child.

How safe is sedation dentistry?

There is always a risk in getting anesthesia. It is usually safe, though, when given by experienced dentists. However, certain people, such as those who are obese or who have obstructive sleep apnea should talk to their doctor before having sedation. That is because they are more likely to develop complications from the anesthesia.

In summary, our 40-year track record speaks for itself in terms of providing not only the very best results but done in a fashion of total comfort and safety. **While you trust our team to meet your needs and help you reach your goals, please trust the level of sedation that our doctors have recommended to help you.**

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