Anxious About Your Next Dental Treatment? | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/anxious-next-treatment/

Details:

Feeling anxious about the dentist is common, and it is nothing to be embarrassed about. At Core Dental we can help you feel calmer by explaining each step before it happens, giving you time to get familiar with our practice, and talking through comfort and pain relief options. Simple habits also help: book promptly rather than putting it off, arrive no more than 15 minutes before your appointment, visit the practice beforehand, and tell us what worries you.

Why can booking a long way ahead make dental anxiety worse?

Booking an appointment well in advance gives you more time to worry before it arrives. Some people feel calmer with a shorter wait, so ask our reception team about the next suitable time. If you wait until you are in a lot of pain, you may need more dental work than if you had been seen sooner, which can add to the worry. Telling us when you book that you feel anxious lets our team plan the visit with you, including whether a longer appointment or an early-in-the-day time would help.

Why shouldn't you wait too long to see the dentist?

This applies both to the time you take to book once you realise you need to see a dentist, and to the time you spend in the waiting room once you are ready to be seen. Waiting until the pain is severe can create extra problems that may prolong or increase the amount of dental work you need. Small problems found early are usually simpler to treat. We reserve emergency appointments where possible, so call us on 13 13 16 if you are in pain and we will work to find you a time.

How early should you arrive for your appointment?

Try to arrive no more than 15 minutes before your appointment time. A long wait in the waiting room can give your thoughts more time to build. If you would rather not wait at all, tell our reception team and we will let you know if we are running behind. Bring a podcast, music or a book if that helps you relax.

How can you get to know the practice before you visit?

Often a real comfort is knowing you are heading into a safe space. You are welcome to visit one of our clinics on a day when you do not have an appointment and sit in the waiting room, doing something familiar like reading a magazine or playing a game on your phone. Spending time in the space can help you see the surgery in another light and create a calmer atmosphere for your next visit. Many people also find it helps to say hello to our reception team in advance.

What can you ask us to explain before treatment?

Contact our team before your appointment and ask for a thorough explanation of what to expect. Knowing what will happen step by step can reduce uncertainty and help you feel informed and in control. Ask what the treatment involves, how long it will take, what you will feel, and what the aftercare is. We quote before treatment starts, so you will also know the cost in advance, and our interest-free payment plans let you spread the cost of treatment over time. You can agree a signal, such as raising your hand, so that you can ask us to pause at any time.

What pain relief and comfort options are available?

If your anxiety comes mainly from the worry of pain, talk to our team about the options available. These range from numbing gel before a local anaesthetic through to IV sedation for suitable patients. Sleep dentistry and IV sedation are available at selected Core Dental clinics, and suitability depends on your health, so your dentist will assess you first and explain the risks. Please ask when you book, so we can confirm which of our clinics can offer it.

Further detail from Core Dental

The following points are drawn from Core Dental's own published material on this topic. They are included here for completeness, and anything that applies to your own treatment should be confirmed with your clinician.

In moments of anger or fear those around us are almost immediately able to identify and accept what we are projecting out to the world. Anxiety is a much more internal process, often focussed on 'What if's' – thoughts that are often not fully formed though can nonetheless become a real source of worry once we get anxious. Going to the dentist can be a truly anxiety ridden experience. If you are worried about your appointment, getting a thorough rundown from one of our helpful team members on what you can expect during your treatment could solve the overriding issue of not feeling in control of the experience.

What anxiety looks like from the outside

Part of what makes dental anxiety hard to raise is that people assume it has to look like fear. The published list of signs includes several that look like something else entirely, which is worth knowing both for yourself and for anyone you bring with you.

The Victorian Department of Health lists what people with dental anxiety may experience:

"sweating"

"racing heartbeat (tachycardia) or palpitations"

"low blood pressure and possible fainting (syncope)"

"visible distress, crying or signs of panic"

"withdrawal, or using humour or aggression to mask anxiety"

That last line is the one to sit with. Joking through an appointment, going quiet, or getting short with the person at reception are all on the Department's own list of how anxiety presents. None of them reads as fear, and all of them are worth naming rather than apologising for.

It also shows up as a pattern rather than a moment. "Some anxious people will routinely miss or avoid dental appointments and may find it difficult to undergo dental treatment, regardless of whether it is simple or complex."

Regardless of whether it is simple or complex. So a cleaning being just as hard as a filling is not irrational, and it is not a sign that the anxiety is out of proportion to the procedure — it is the described pattern.

Some conditions raise the risk, and that is published too. "Some mental health conditions including generalised anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or a previous history of head and neck trauma can increase the risk of a person experiencing dental anxiety. Other conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia may also increase the risk of anxiety disorders, including dental anxiety."

And the Department's own note of optimism, which is a statement about dentists rather than about patients: "Many anxious dental patients can find a dentist who can support them appropriately to cope with going to the dentist."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental anxiety and phobia, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). Accessed 6 November 2026.

There is a recognised specialty for this

Most people managing dental fear do not know that special needs dentistry is a formally recognised dental specialty in Australia, with its own registration. The published advice points to it directly, and it is a more concrete option than "find a patient dentist".

It is one of the thirteen. The Dental Board of Australia states that "there are 13 dental specialties in Australia which are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council", and special needs dentistry is on that list, alongside endodontics, orthodontics, paediatric dentistry, periodontics, prosthodontics and the rest.

The Department lists it as somewhere to get help for dental anxiety and phobia, naming "a specialist in special needs dentistry" among its sources of help alongside your dentist and a psychologist.

What specialist registration means. All applicants for specialist registration "must be qualified and meet the requirements set out in the Board's Specialist registration standard", and those requirements include having "completed a minimum of two years general dental practice ... and met all other requirements for general registration as a dentist". It is a registration category, not a self-described interest.

And you can check it yourself. "Ahpra publishes an online register of all dental practitioners that provides the profession and the public with up-to-date information about a dental practitioner's registration status. This register also includes details of the specialty or specialties for dentists who hold specialist registration."

So for anyone whose anxiety has made treatment genuinely difficult, there is a recognised specialty, a published standard behind it, and a public register that tells you who holds it.

Two more reasons not to let the next appointment slide. The Department ties the practical cost to timing: avoiding the dentist leads to "a greater need for emergency care or more complex treatment", while "regular dental check-ups, cleans and X-rays of the teeth can prevent dental disease and help the dentist find any problems early so that simpler and less invasive treatments are needed".

And it places oral health inside general health rather than beside it: "The lifestyle factors that lead to dental disease (regularly consuming sugary food and drinks, smoking and regularly drinking alcohol) are very similar to those that lead to diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke and some cancers. So, it is important to live a healthy lifestyle and to take care of your oral health by brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing once a day."

What to say when you book, in the Department's framing. "It is important to let the dentist know if you experience any level of dental anxiety. Open discussion around the individual triggers of anxiety can help the dentist work with you to tailor a management plan."

Any level — the Department's own words. You do not need to have a phobia for it to be worth mentioning, and naming the specific trigger is more useful than naming the feeling.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental anxiety and phobia, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025); Dental Board of Australia, Specialist Registration, dentalboard.gov.au (the page states it was reviewed 18/03/2025). Both accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Is it normal to feel nervous about the dentist?

Yes. Dental anxiety is common, and our team is used to helping people who feel nervous. Let us know when you book, and we will plan your visit around what helps you feel at ease.

Should I tell the dentist I am anxious?

Yes. Telling us lets us slow down, explain each step and agree a signal to pause. You do not need to explain why you feel anxious unless you want to.

Can I visit the clinic before my appointment?

You are welcome to call in to one of our clinics during opening hours to see the waiting room and meet our team. Call ahead so that we can arrange a suitable time.

What if I am afraid of pain?

Talk to our dentist about pain relief before treatment. Options include a numbing gel, local anaesthetic and, at selected clinics for suitable patients, IV sedation. Your dentist will explain the benefits and risks.

Is sedation suitable for everyone?

No. Whether sedation suits you depends on your medical history, medicines and the treatment planned. Your dentist will assess you and explain the options before anything is arranged.

I joke my way through appointments — is that anxiety?

It can be. "Withdrawal, or using humour or aggression to mask anxiety" is on the Victorian Department of Health's own list of how dental anxiety presents, alongside sweating, "racing heartbeat (tachycardia) or palpitations", "low blood pressure and possible fainting (syncope)" and "visible distress, crying or signs of panic".

Why is a simple cleaning as hard for me as a filling?

That is the described pattern rather than an overreaction. "Some anxious people will routinely miss or avoid dental appointments and may find it difficult to undergo dental treatment, regardless of whether it is simple or complex."

Are some people more likely to find dental visits difficult?

Yes, and the Department names conditions: "Some mental health conditions including generalised anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or a previous history of head and neck trauma can increase the risk of a person experiencing dental anxiety. Other conditions such as

depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia may also increase the risk of anxiety disorders, including dental anxiety."

Is there a dental specialty for people who find treatment very difficult?

Yes — special needs dentistry. The Dental Board of Australia lists it among the "13 dental specialties in Australia which are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council", and the Department lists "a specialist in special needs dentistry" among the places to get help with dental anxiety or phobia.

How do I know someone really holds that specialty?

You can check the public register. "Ahpra publishes an online register of all dental practitioners that provides the profession and the public with up-to-date information about a dental practitioner's registration status. This register also includes details of the specialty or specialties for dentists who hold specialist registration."

What does specialist registration require?

Applicants "must be qualified and meet the requirements set out in the Board's Specialist registration standard", which include having "completed a minimum of two years general dental practice ... and met all other requirements for general registration as a dentist".

Do I have to be severely phobic before it is worth mentioning?

No. The Department's wording is deliberately broad: "It is important to let the dentist know if you experience any level of dental anxiety. Open discussion around the individual triggers of anxiety can help the dentist work with you to tailor a management plan."

Is it realistic to find a dentist I can cope with?

The Department thinks so: "Many anxious dental patients can find a dentist who can support them appropriately to cope with going to the dentist."

What does putting it off actually cost?

Avoiding the dentist leads to "a greater need for emergency care or more complex treatment", while "regular dental check-ups, cleans and X-rays of the teeth can prevent dental disease and help the dentist find any problems early so that simpler and less invasive treatments are needed".

Does any of this connect to the rest of my health?

The Department puts it in one sentence: "The lifestyle factors that lead to dental disease (regularly consuming sugary food and drinks, smoking and regularly drinking alcohol) are very similar to those that lead to diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke and some cancers."

Related services and further reading

General dentistry

Sleep dentistry

Emergency dentistry

Children's dentistry

Understanding your treatment

5 tips to help with dental anxiety in children

Dental check-ups

Dental payment plans

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

Interest-free payment plans, HICAPS on-site claiming, and bulk billing for eligible children under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule.

Call 13 13 16 or book online at coredental.com.au.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm, Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside, Glenferrie

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

Is dental anxiety common?

Yes, dental anxiety is common. At Core Dental our dentists and nurses are used to caring for nervous patients and will explain each step, move at your pace and agree a signal with you.

How early should I arrive for a dental appointment if I am anxious?

Arrive no more than 15 minutes before your appointment, because a long wait can give you more time to worry. Core Dental reception can also help you choose a time that suits you.

Why does booking far in advance increase dental anxiety?

A long gap before your appointment gives you more time to worry. At Core Dental you can ask for the next suitable time and tell us you are anxious so we can plan your visit.

How can I get comfortable in a dental practice before treatment?

You can visit a Core Dental clinic on a day without an appointment, sit in the waiting room doing something familiar, and meet our team. Call ahead so we can arrange a suitable time.

What pain relief options does Core Dental offer anxious patients?

Options range from numbing gel and local anaesthetic to IV sedation for suitable patients at selected Core Dental clinics. Your dentist will assess your health and explain the benefits and risks before treatment.

Which Core Dental clinics offer sleep dentistry or IV sedation?

Sleep dentistry and IV sedation are offered at selected Core Dental clinics rather than every site. Call 13 13 16 or ask when you book and we will confirm the nearest clinic that can help.

What should I ask my dentist before treatment?

Ask what the treatment involves, how long it takes, what you will feel and what aftercare is needed. At Core Dental we quote before treatment starts so you also know the cost in advance.

How do I book an appointment at Core Dental?

Book online through coredental.com.au or call 13 13 16. We have nine clinics across Melbourne, open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, and our team will help you choose a time.