**What You Can Do To Lessen Your Gag Reflex**

Whether your gag reflex is triggered by physiological factors or psychological ones, you can take steps to lower your chances of gagging when having dental work done.

**1. Concentrate on breathing through your nose**

Breathing through your mouth is one of the most common gag reflex triggers, but it’s often the default when your mouth is propped open. Focus your attention on breathing deeply through your nose instead. If a cold or allergies have resulted in a stuffy nose, take an over-the-counter decongestant prior to arriving at your dentist’s office or try using nasal strips.

**2. Don’t attempt to swallow your saliva**

No one likes the idea of drooling in the dentist’s chair, but trying to prevent drool from escaping your mouth by swallowing your saliva often leads to gagging.

**3. Find a distraction**

Taking your focus off of your mouth can often lessen your chances of engaging your gag reflex. Squeezing a stress ball, listening to music through headphones or employing self-hypnosis techniques are all excellent distractions from ongoing dental work.

**4. Employ desensitization techniques prior to your dental appointment**

In advance of any dental work, you can take steps to reduce your soft palate’s gag-inducing sensitivity to touch. Locate where your gag reflex begins on your tongue using your toothbrush, and then brush in this spot for about ten seconds. After repeating this for several nights, you’ll find that you gag less. Continue the same process nightly, moving your toothbrush back as your gag reflex slowly becomes desensitized. While this may be unpleasant at first, this desensitization technique can actually offer a long-term treatment for your over-active gag reflex over the course of about a month.

**What Your Dentist Can Do To Help**

Because having your gag reflex triggered by dental work is so common, dentists in general are well aware of this issue and have methods to help you reduce or prevent your gag reflex while in their chair.

**1. Listen to your concerns**

First and foremost, speaking to your dentist about your issues with gagging can be one of the most effective tools for avoiding triggering your gag reflex while in his chair. If your dentist understands your issue, he can work with you to create a signal for when your gag reflex is becoming overwhelming, such as raising your left hand. Knowing that you can get a break when you need one can help significantly reduce gag-inducing anxiety.

**2. Apply a topical anesthetic spray or gel**

For many who struggle with gagging at the dentist, their gag reflex is triggered by instruments touching the roof of their mouth or the back of their tongue or throat. A topical anesthetic spray or gel can numb these areas and eliminate this common gag reflex trigger.

**3. Allow you to receive treatment while seated**

Dental work is most commonly performed while the patient is reclining in the dentist’s chair, but this position allows saliva and the various dental materials to flow down the throat and trigger the gag reflex. For certain types of dental work, your dentist may be able to sit you up during the procedure and allow you to angle your head forward, lessening your chances of gagging.

**4. Use a rubber mouth dam**

In cases where sitting up during the dental procedure is not possible, a rubber mouth dam can also help lessen a common cause of gagging by providing a barrier that prevents fluids and other dental debris from entering your mouth and throat.

**5. Provide nitrous oxide or sedation**

Particularly if your gag reflex is severe, receiving nitrous oxide–more commonly referred to as laughing gas–during dental work can significantly lower or eliminate your gagging. This effect is widely acknowledged and has been documented by the U.S. National Library of Medicine. Speak with your dentist before your appointment to see if they can administer nitrous oxide to you during your dental procedure.