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Oxfordshire Community Dental Service

Dental anxiety

Going the extra mile to make Oxfordshire smile

This booklet was produced by staff from **TalkingSpace**, Oxfordshire's Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Service (IAPT) and the **Oxfordshire Community Dental Service**. The advice and information is the best we can give based on the research evidence at the time of writing.

Oxfordshire Community Dental Service provides specialised care and treatment for patients with dental anxiety.

The team is made up of specialist dentists and dental nurses. They can provide a talking therapy called Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) to help you manage your dental anxiety so that you can receive the dental treatment you need.



What is dental anxiety?

Dental anxiety is the feeling of being nervous or afraid of going to the dentist.

There are a variety of reasons why people have a fear of the dentist and feel anxious about having dental treatment.

Some of the most common reasons include :

- A fear about specific procedures causing dental pain.
- The intimacy of a check-up and feelings of loss of control.
- Being told off about the state of your oral health.
- A negative past experience at the dentist.
- The sterile smell and the clinical environment.
- A phobia about needles.

Signs and symptoms of dental anxiety

Dental anxiety can present in many different ways but common signs and symptoms include:

- Physical symptoms of anxiety such as increased heart rate, sweating and nausea.
- Irregular dental visits or complete avoidance of dentists and dental treatment.
- Low self-confidence if oral health is poor.
- Embarrassment about dental fears.



What is CBT?

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a talking treatment that has been shown to be helpful to many people experiencing anxiety problems.

During appointments you will be helped to see how your thoughts, feelings and behaviour interact to keep you anxious about dental treatment.

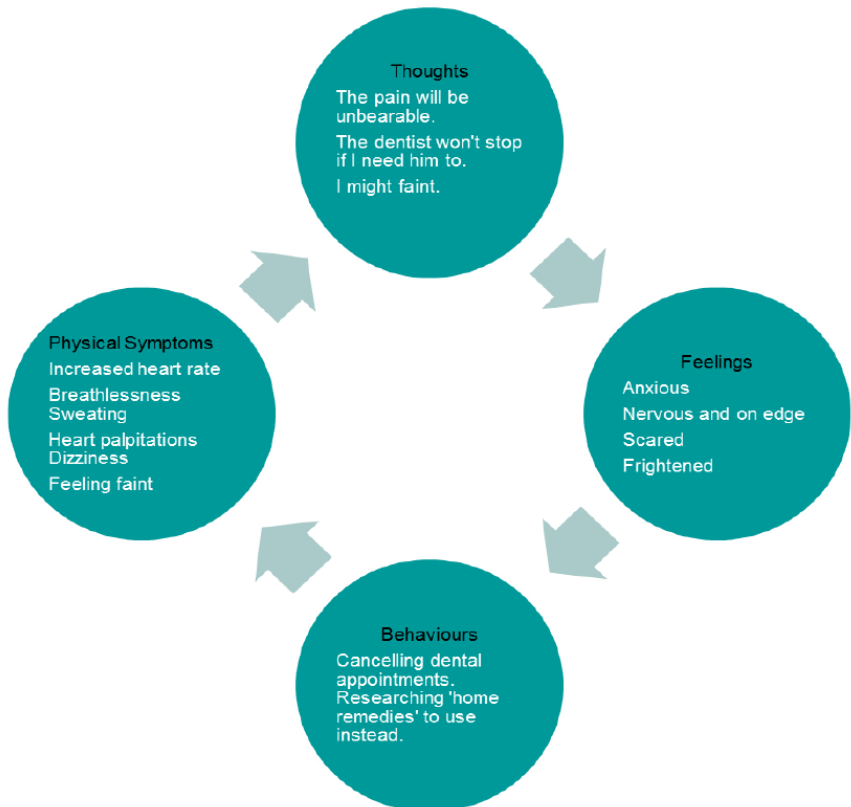
CBT aims to help you identify and change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that get in the way of your receiving the dental treatment that you need.

You will be introduced to a number of strategies to help manage your anxiety and come up with ideas of things you can do between appointments to make progress in overcoming your difficulties.

Case example

Emma, a 45 year old woman, has experienced nine months of tooth ache. She had a painful tooth extraction when she was 16 years old and has avoided going to the dentist for most of her adult life. Emma is worried that she will need treatment and that it will be painful.

The diagram below shows what happens when Emma's tooth hurts and she thinks about dental treatment.



Key strategies in CBT for Dental anxiety

There are three main strategies in CBT for dental anxiety. These are:

1. Graded exposure.
2. Thought challenging.
3. Relaxation and distraction techniques.

Graded exposure involves gradually confronting the dental treatment you are avoiding. In Emma's case, she was able to visit the dental treatment room on several occasions as part of becoming more comfortable there.

Thought challenging involves identifying unhelpful thoughts that create distress and helping you to evaluate their accuracy. Through this process you will be helped to create more balanced thoughts which can help reduce your anxiety levels.

Relaxation techniques are used to address the physical symptoms of anxiety. They can help slow down your breathing rate and reduce any muscle tension.

Distraction techniques are used to help you shift your focus of attention away from situations and procedures that may cause you distress.

Dental staff will support you to develop your own CBT 'tool kit' of strategies to manage your dental anxiety.



Useful contacts

www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk

www.dentalphobia.co.uk/fact-sheets/dental-phobia.html



www.anxietyuk.org.uk/

Text service: 07537 416 905

Infoline: 03444 775 774 Mon-Fri 9.30am-5.30pm



<https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/talkingspaceplus/>

Email: talkingspaceplus@nhs.net

Tel: 01865 901222

Oxfordshire Community Dental Service http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/service_description/dental-services/

Tel: 01865 904040

Email: Oral.Health@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Concerns and Complaints

We aim to provide you with a high quality service at all times. However, if you have any concerns, complaints or comments about your experience of our service then please tell a member of the team or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on freephone: 0800 328 7971.

Please contact us if you would like the information in another language or different format.

Arabic يُرجى الاتصال بنا إذا كنتم ترغبون في الحصول على المعلومات بلغة أخرى أو بتنسيق مختلف.

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Chinese 若要以其他語言或格式提供這些資訊，請與我們聯繫

Polish Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, skontaktuj się z nami.

Portuguese Queira contactar-nos se pretender as informações noutra idioma ou num formato diferente.

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If you would like more information or would like to download copies of leaflets please go to the website above.