



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **Top Tips for Going to the Dentist**

## **Sensory Processing**

Issued by the Occupational Therapy Sensory Processing Team

Visiting the dentist can be an overwhelming experience for some people, especially for those who struggle to process sensory information.

People may squirm in the dentist's chair due to the bright lights located above the chair, or dislike being in a reclined position for a prolonged period of time, or they may struggle to deal with loud dentistry tools.

Included below are several strategies that can be tried. Consider talking with your dentist before the appointment on how best to implement them.

## **Before the dental appointment:**

- To reduce anxiety: at home, role-play going to dentist. Also, ask if you can visit the dental practice with the person before the appointment.
- Keep scheduled check-ups.
- Consider telling the person about the appointment as early as you can and discuss any worries they may have.
- Social stories can be helpful to explain what is going to happen at the appointment and why it is necessary.
- Try a facial massage, applying firm pressure around the mouth to help desensitise the area.
- Drinking thick fluids through a straw or eating a chewy snack on the way to the dentist can provide a calming and regulating input.
- Heavy work activities or wearing a backpack containing a water bottle or books whilst walking to dentist can help to calm and regulate.

- Also consider planning a lovely activity to do after the appointment.

## During the dental appointment:

- Encourage your dentist to explain each step of the process.
- Allow the person to see tools the dentist may use if they are comfortable with this.
- Consider using a visual timer to indicate how long the dentist visit will take.
- If the person is sensitive to light, consider using protective sunglasses or a hat to reduce the intensity of the dentist's light.
- Consider turning off any unnecessary lights to reduce the overall lighting level.
- If the dentist's drill is required, let the drill run for 30 seconds outside the mouth to allow the person to get used to the noise.
- If the person is noise sensitive, try to reduce the overall noise level in the room, for example, turn off the radio. Also, consider using ear defenders or noise cancelling earbuds.
- Consider bringing fidget toys or a comfort toy/item to help with distraction.
- Consider using a weighted lap pad during the visit to provide a calming input.

## Additional information

A sensory processing article to share with your dentist.

[Information for Dentists: Sensory Processing](#)

Social stories.

[An example of a social story: Suzie goes to the Dentist](#)

A Video resource around social stories have been developed by Sheffield's NHS People's Sensory Processing Service.

[Making Sense: Social Stories](#)

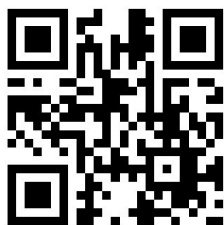
## Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS)

You may be able to claim a refund of some travel costs under this scheme. For more information visit the NHS website:

[www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcosts/pages/travelcosts.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcosts/pages/travelcosts.aspx)

## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, easy read, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.



British Sign Language users can use InterpretersLive! a service provided by Sign Solutions. This helps Deaf people to access BSL interpreters, and other communication professionals at any time. More information can be found on our website or by scanning

the QR code to the left.

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

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