

Tip #4: You Can Help Yourself Get Numb!

This may be my favorite tip of all! Weird, I know, but I take a lot of pride in **GETTING MY PATIENTS TOTALLY NUMB!**

I have been in the dental chair myself when I wasn't numb, and I will never do that to anyone! Believe it or not, there are several things YOU can do to help yourself get numb.

These are true whether you are getting a root canal or just regular dental treatment. Some of these tips actually will help you get numb, while others will help you be better able to “get through” the shot.

Root canals should NOT hurt!

That is a bold claim, but I truly believe it.

Toothaches hurt.

Shots can hurt

But, root canals should **NOT** hurt.

Why not? Because the tooth should be **NUMB!** And a numb tooth cannot feel pain!

Remember, the pain of the shot is for a very short time. But, achieving total numbness is the goal – and it makes surviving the root canal a breeze!

Remain CALM...

Anxiety works against your ability to get numb. But, you can do several things to calm yourself for treatment:

1. Take sedatives prior to treatment.
2. Ask to be given laughing gas (nitrous oxide and oxygen) during treatment (or at least during the shot).
3. Consider self-hypnosis. This may sound a little weird, I know. But, I have seen it work.

I once watched a dentist friend treat a patient who came in, sat in the chair, and asked to be left alone for a few minutes to go into a self-hypnotic state so she would not need any shots!

I would not have believed it if I had not seen it. She did not flinch one time during the treatment. She was either crazy or super tough! Maybe a little of both?!

I don't know if she was truly self-hypnotized, but it really didn't matter! She had found a way to calm herself and help herself survive!

4. Another way to help you remain calm is a simple one: ask if you can hold the hand of the dental assistant during the shot.

In my office, my super sweet assistants place a hand on the patient's shoulder during the entire shot, often giving the patient a reassuring pat.

That human touch means a great deal to people!

It not only helps you remain calm, but it also serves to distract you somewhat from what is going on. Both of these reduce your anxiety, increasing your chances for total numbness!

Bad infection? Bad swelling?

If you have a lot of swelling from a badly infected tooth, your dentist may prescribe antibiotics before he treats you. YOU may be able to help insure total numbness by actually requesting that (if they are indicated), and maybe requesting an anti-inflammatory medication, as well.

Often, if you take these medications for a period of time BEFORE treatment, the tooth will be easier to get numb. This is a decision your dentist can help you make.

Sometimes it is necessary to do the work in the presence of swelling and infection and then give antibiotics after treatment. But, often, reducing the swelling and infection can be of help with our anesthetics.

“My dentist always has trouble getting me numb.”

EVERYTIME you go to the dentist, this is one of those things you definitely want to tell him BEFORE he starts treatment.

Knowing that history, we can use different techniques when giving a shot. We can also use different types of anesthetics, or use 1 or 2 different types in combination.

Also, for patients with this history, we will often let our anesthesia sit a little longer than normal before ever starting the treatment. Since endodontists are specialists in treating the nerves inside teeth, we have to know several different techniques to get our patients totally numb!

One thing you can do is ask your dentist if they use “**intraosseous shots**”. This is a safe and effective technique that can be a super addition to regular shots.

This type of shot numbs the entire tooth, bone and gum areas, and it takes effect immediately. It is not necessary in all cases, but I use it routinely in my practice to help insure total numbness.

It cannot be used in all patients, so by all means ask your dentist first. If you or your dentist has any questions about this technique, please feel free to email me anytime.

How about trying a 5,000 year old technique?

This tip is one I have been given by some patients over the past 20(+) years I have been in practice. They swear by it. It is the use of *acupressure*.

This is similar to what we all have done to ourselves when we bang our arm against a counter. What is the first thing we do? We press hard right over the spot we hit!

That is a form of pressure anesthesia – or acupressure. Using acupressure during a shot is what some patients do to help them tolerate the pain of the injection.

There are several acupressure points throughout the body. But, the most common technique used by these patients is to use your thumb and forefinger on one hand to squeeze the soft tissues between the thumb and forefinger on the other hand.

Applying this pressure and holding it, especially during the shot, can be an effective use of acupressure for some patients. You can find a lot more information about this technique online. I am by no means an expert in this ancient technique. However, when it comes to helping relieve the discomfort of a shot, I am all for the patient doing whatever it takes!

Test the tooth before starting

One last thing you can do to help you overcome your fears of feeling pain during the root canal is to ask the dentist if they would please “test” the tooth to be sure it is numb before starting.

This is a very easy test. The dentist or the staff can simply touch the tooth with a cold piece of cotton. If you feel no sensation, this is usually a good indication you are numb!

If you feel ANYTHING, the dentist knows to add some more anesthesia before starting his treatment. A very comforting test for you – don’t be afraid to ask for it!

“Why does my heart beat fast after a shot?”

This really has no bearing on “getting numb”, but this is a concern for many patients, so I’d like to address it for you.

Some patients even think they are “allergic to the anesthesia” because their heart races. In reality, almost everyone’s heart rate is up when they are going to the dentist. That is just human nature.

But, there is a real reason for why your heart beats faster after a shot. Many anesthetics we use have a very small amount of **epinephrine** in them. This is the medication you see the TV doctors on “ER” injecting directly into patient’s hearts to stimulate the heart.

It is *supposed to* make your heart beat faster! In the dental setting, it is a tiny amount, and therefore, the heart only beats faster for a few minutes, and then returns to normal. It can be disconcerting, but a perfectly normal response.

Some ask, “Why do they even have epinephrine in the shot?” Good question! The primary reason is that it REALLY helps keep the anesthetic solution in the area, so the numbness doesn’t wear off so quickly.

And, when you are getting a root canal, that is a **GOOD** thing.

Since being totally numb and not feeling any pain during treatment are real concerns for our patients, anything you can do to improve your chances of getting numb is important.

**If you use the tips in this chapter,
you really CAN help yourself get numb!**