

Making Dentist Visits More Tolerable



Going to the dentist can be overwhelming for both you and your child when your child is highly sensitive to tactile sensations in the mouth. The following strategies may help decrease your child's anxiety with regards to dentist visits.

BEFORE GOING TO THE DENTIST:

- Have your child participate in proprioceptive and heavy work activities right before going to the appointment (playing tug-of-war, play wrestling, jumping on a trampoline, pulling on theraband, being squished under pillows, being rolled up into a blanket, shoveling snow, climbing around in a jungle gym, bear hugs...).
- Use the Wilbarger Brushing Protocol prior to the visit (ask your OT to show you how to do the protocol).
- Do oral-motor brushing to decrease sensitivity (ask your OT to show you how to do the oral-motor protocol).
- Have your child wear "close-fitting" clothing or body-suit underneath their clothes for some even deep pressure.
- Bring a sports bottle with water, or a cup of ice chips, for your child to drink from or suck on during the ride to the dentist.
- If possible, allow your child to run around outside until it is their turn. Most waiting rooms can promote increased anxiety and running around can promote a calmer nervous system.
- Allow the child to use a vibrating massager while waiting; use around mouth and/or hold it in their hands.

DURING THE EXAMINATION:

- Have the child squeeze a stress ball or fidget toy during procedures and cleanings.
- Allow the child to wear a weighted vest, weighted lap pad, or the x-ray vest during cleaning/dental work to promote a calmer nervous system through deep pressure input.
- Have the dentist, or hygienist, allow your child to feel the instruments being used before they use them, and explain what the instrument is for/will do (particularly important if it makes a loud sound or vibrates!).
- If the noise made by any of the equipment is too much, allow the child to wear hearing protectors or listen to music during the session.
- If the bright light used by the dentist is too much, allow the child to wear an eye mask or sunglasses.