

# Dental health psychology service for adults with dental anxiety

Information for patients from the  
**Department of Sedation and Special Care Dentistry**  
Floor 26, Guy's Tower, Guy's Hospital  
t: **020 7188 6074**

The aim of this leaflet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about psychological support for your dental fear. It provides you with information about the service, how we can help you and how to contact us.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a dentist or dental nurse.

## What is the dental health psychology service for adults with dental anxiety?

The service provides support for people who are very anxious about visiting the dentist. The service is provided in the Department of Sedation and Special Care Dentistry at Guy's Hospital. We have our own rooms for seeing people, away from the main dental area.

The service offers a number of different ways to help people who are anxious about visiting the dentist or having dental treatment. It is led by psychologists and is free of charge.

Psychologists are trained healthcare professionals who help people manage their emotional concerns over a specific period of time. They do **not** prescribe medicines.

The service works with other members of the dental team including dentists, nurses and dental hygienists. They are also trained to meet the needs of patients who are anxious about visiting the dentist.

## How can the service help me?

The psychologist will work with you to identify your priorities for changing how you feel about visiting the dentist. Many patients want help with:

- feeling less anxious about going into the dental surgery
- feeling less anxious about receiving a dental injection
- having dental treatment
- taking children to the dentist.

## How can I access the service?

To access the service, please speak to your dentist or GP about a referral. They will write to us, and we will then make an appointment for you to be seen and assessed.

## What happens at my first appointment?

Your first appointment will take up to an hour-and-a-half. The psychologist will talk to you about your concerns and how you usually cope with dental treatment. He/she will also ask you some questions about how you feel when you are thinking about going to, or actually going to, the dentist. After this, the psychologist will discuss with you whether a series of appointments is likely to be helpful.

Appointments are arranged between 9am and 4pm, Monday to Friday. They usually last for one hour and they take place in the Department of Sedation and Special Care, Floor 26, Tower Wing, Guy's Hospital at London Bridge.

## How we can help you – cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

One of the ways we can help people who are fearful of going to the dentist is called **cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)**.

In CBT, the psychologist helps you to identify problems and search for solutions. This helps you to link your thinking patterns, beliefs, emotions and behaviour, and notice how they affect each other. You could also be given self-help assignments, such as practising relaxation skills or learning about dental equipment. These can help you learn to deal with your dental fear.

CBT has been found to be very effective for people with dental anxiety. It will help you to develop positive coping skills, such as:

- achieving goals by breaking them down into small steps
- replacing your unhelpful thought patterns with helpful thoughts
- improving your belief in your ability to cope
- learning how to control your anxiety levels.

## How many appointments for CBT will I need?

This varies from person to person. You can stop seeing the psychologist at any time you like, but we hope that this will be after your anxiety has improved. In the long-term, if you feel that you need more help with your dental anxiety, or if you feel that the level of anxiety is increasing again, you are free to come back to the service.

## Will I see a dentist at my first appointment?

No, your first appointment is only with the psychologist.

You may see a dentist at your second or third appointment if you have been referred by your GP or if you have not seen a dentist in a long time. This is for your own health and well-being, and to check that you have no urgent dental treatment needs.

We will always ask for your permission to perform the examination. If you agree, a dentist will briefly examine your mouth and teeth. This will be done in a non-dental room and without the use of any dental equipment. We may also arrange for you to have an x-ray that takes a panoramic image of your mouth. This is called an orthopantogram or OPG and does not involve having anything inside your mouth. **We can discuss this with you in more detail at your first appointment.**

## What happens if I need urgent dental treatment?

If, following the brief dental examination, you need urgent dental treatment, we will discuss this with you in detail.

If appropriate, it may be possible to complete your treatment under sedation within the Department of Sedation and Special Care. The department specialises in treating anxious patients or those who have difficulty accessing dental care, and offers various conscious sedation techniques. We will discuss your options with you in detail and answer any questions you may have.

## Confidentiality and privacy

Your visits to the service are private and confidential. Information on your appointments with the psychologist will be held in your dental notes. These notes are only available to the healthcare professionals who are immediately involved in your care. However, if there is something you would not like the psychologist to share with other members of the dental team, we will respect your wishes. The only exception to that will be if you or someone that you know is at risk or unsafe, as we have a legal responsibility to share this with relevant professionals. All of this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

After your initial assessment, we will write to the person who referred you (either your dentist or your GP) to let them know that you are attending CBT sessions. We will also send a copy of this letter to you and, if you agree, to your GP, if they were not the person who referred you.

At the end of your series of appointments, we will write to the person who referred you again to let them know about the progress you have made. You will also receive a copy of this letter. At that point we will also discuss your dental needs with you and decide on the most appropriate setting for that treatment. This may be your own dentist or a specialist in the hospital setting.

From time to time, the service has postgraduate trainee health psychologists attending to find out about how we work. If you do not want the students to be present, please let us know. This will not affect your care in any way and your wishes will always be respected.

## Who can I contact for more information?

If you have any questions or concerns about the dental health psychology service for adults who are anxious about visiting the dentist, please contact the Department of Sedation and Special Care Dentistry on **020 7188 6074** (9am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday).

You can also contact the following members of staff:

- **Professor J Tim Newton** (consultant health psychologist) on **020 7188 6066** or email: [Tim.Newton@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:Tim.Newton@kcl.ac.uk)
- **Dr Jennifer Hare** (health psychologist) on **020 7188 6066** or email: [Jennifer.Hare@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:Jennifer.Hare@kcl.ac.uk)
- **Dr David Craig** (Head of the Department of Sedation and Special Care Dentistry) on **020 7188 6066** or e mail: [David.Craig@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:David.Craig@kcl.ac.uk)

**Our health psychologists are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the regulatory body for psychologists and other health professionals.**

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)                      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language and Accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

**t:** 020 7188 8815      **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

