

Dental psychology service for adults with dental anxiety

This leaflet will answer some of your questions about psychological support for your dental fear. It gives information about the service, how we can help you and how to contact us. If you have any questions, please speak to a dentist or dental nurse.

We provide support for people who are very anxious about visiting the dentist. The service is provided with 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.

We offer different ways to help people who are anxious about visiting the dentist or having dental treatment. The service is led by psychologists and is free.

Psychologists are healthcare professionals who help people manage their emotional concerns. They do **not** prescribe medicines.

The service works with other members of the dental team including dentists, nurses and dental hygienists.

How we can help you

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 to access the service

Speak to your dentist or GP about a referral. They will write to us, and we will make an appointment for you to be seen and assessed.

Your first appointment

Your first appointment will take up to 90 minutes. The psychologist will talk to you about your concerns and how you usually cope with dental treatment. They will ask you questions about how you feel when you are thinking about going to, or actually going to, the dentist. After this, they will discuss with you if a series of appointments is likely to be helpful.

Appointments are arranged for between 9am and 4pm, Monday to Friday. They usually last for 1 hour and take place in the Department of sedation and special care, Floor 26, Tower Wing, Guy's Hospital at London Bridge.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

One way we can help people is 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 can 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 ones
- improving your belief in your ability to cope
- learning how to control your anxiety levels

How many appointments will you need?

This is different for each 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 can come back to the service.

Will you see a dentist?

Your first appointment is **only** with the psychologist.

You might 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 can be done in a non-dental room and without the use of any dental equipment. We might also arrange for you to have an X-ray that takes an image of your mouth. This is called an orthopantomogram (OPG) and does not involve having anything inside your mouth. We can discuss this with you in more detail at your first appointment.

Urgent dental treatment?

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

If appropriate, it might be possible to complete your treatment under sedation in the Department of sedation and special care. The department specialises in treating anxious patients or those who have difficulty accessing dental care, and offers conscious sedation techniques. We will discuss your options with you in detail and answer any questions you 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 assessment, we will write to the person who referred you (your dentist or your GP) to let them know that you are having CBT sessions. We will 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 might be your own dentist or a specialist in the hospital setting.

Sometimes we have postgraduate trainee psychologists with us, so that they can find out 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.

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

Notes

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the dental psychology service, please contact the Department of Sedation and Special Care Dentistry, **phone:** 020 7188 6074, Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm.

Dental Psychology Service, Floor 26, Guy's Tower, Guy's Hospital, **phone:** 020 7188 6074

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline, **phone:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm, **email:** mymedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **phone:** 020 7188 8801, **email:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk. To make a complaint, contact the complaints department, **phone:** 020 7188 3514, **email:** 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, **phone:** 020 7188 8815, **email:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **phone:** 111, **web:** www.111.nhs.uk

NHS website

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing, **web:** www.nhs.uk

Become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch, **phone:** 0800 731 0319, **email:** members@gstt.nhs.uk, **web:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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