

# A Safe, Effective Way To Reduce Dental Anxiety

*Submitted by:*

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Does the thought of having to sit in a dental chair make you or your children tense with anxiety? Would you rather deal with a toothache than having to step foot in a dental office? You are not alone. For those with mild to moderate dental anxiety, an inhaled sedative agent, or nitrous oxide, may be the answer.

Nitrous oxide, sometimes called 'laughing gas', is a safe and effective sedative agent that helps both adults and children relax by reducing or eliminating pain and anxiety in the 'awake' or conscious patient. The gas is mixed with oxygen and inhaled through a small mask that fits only over the nose. After a few minutes of breathing normally through the nose, nitrous oxide will begin to take effect. The feeling experienced by each patient can vary, but most describe their arms and legs feel heavy, a floating feeling, or a slight tingling sensation. Many will simply say it has a 'calming effect'. At the end of the procedure, these effects can be quickly reversed by the administration of oxygen. The patient returns to pre-procedure mobility and feeling.

Despite many movies' exaggerated portrayal of adverse reactions, nitrous oxide is safe for most adults and children. Patients under the sedation of nitrous oxide have stable vital signs, do not lose protective reflexes, and can respond normally to verbal commands. Nitrous oxide does not put patients 'to sleep' like a general anesthesia scenario at a hospital. Falling asleep can occur, but a patient retains all of their protective reflexes, unlike being under general anesthesia. Furthermore, the dentist has the ability to quickly alter the degree of sedation if it becomes too intense, which is unique to nitrous oxide.

### **Advantages of Nitrous Oxide**

- Very safe with few side effects
- Works very rapidly, can help relax within 5 minutes
- Reduces reactions to dental treatment
- Reduces the amount that pain is acknowledged
- Increases tolerance for longer appointments
- Minimizes severe gagging
- Quickly reversible, patients are able to drive after procedure
- Minimal contraindications to its use

There are contraindications for its use, but are few in number. Talk to your dentist to see if nitrous oxide sedation is a good fit for you.

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