



## Questions and Answers About Oral Sedation Dentistry

### 1) What is oral sedation dentistry?

Sometimes referred to as “comfortable” or “relaxation” dentistry, the terms describe the feelings most patients experience during their oral sedation appointments. The purpose of oral sedation is to allow a dentist to work more effectively by helping a patient become as comfortable as possible through the use of sedative medications administered orally and sublingually.

Appropriately trained dentists can use a variety of protocols customized to a patient’s physiological and pharmacological needs. A number of oral agents developed especially for these purposes, subjected to rigorous research and testing, are safe and have been used for decades. Those in the benzodiazepine class, such as triazolam and diazepam, have “amnesic” properties, meaning that patients remember little to nothing of their time in the dental chair by the next day. Other medications sometimes used in sedation protocols include antihistamines, like hydroxyzine, and insomnia medications, like zaleplon, which aid in relaxing and calming a patient.

The term “sleep dentistry” is inappropriate. Patients are never meant to sleep through their appointments and should always be able to verbally and physically respond to cues from the doctor or team.

### 2) Which patients benefit the most from sedation?

Oral sedation dentistry can benefit a wide range of patients, including people with:

- High dental anxiety and fear
- A severe gag reflex
- Time constraints—those who need to get more dentistry done in fewer visits
- Chronic or acute jaw soreness
- Physical limitations such as back and neck problems
- Difficulty getting numb
- A reluctance to previously complete treatment plans (see question 3)
- Extensive treatment needs
- A desire to have dentistry done comfortably while they are fully relaxed

### 3) How does using sedation dentistry help you get existing patients to accept the treatment they’ve long put off?

Many DOCS members have found a similar pattern. A huge percentage of patients who come in for prophylaxis have often put off routine treatment for decades. The simple reason behind it: they are secretly anxious. Although they will sometimes come in for hygiene appointments, they stop when it comes to more extensive treatment because they are afraid. When they discover that they can have their dentistry performed while they are sedated—without the use of an IV needle—people become much more likely to complete their treatment plans.

#### 4) I've always had difficulty treating anxious patients. How will that be different with sedation?

Treating anxious and fearful patients **without** sedation can be difficult.

They often require extra consolation and reassurance, and are not always cooperative. It can take an hour to complete what would ordinarily take five minutes. **However, with the proper amount of sedation, these patients are safely and quickly transformed into the best and most enjoyable patients to treat.** Because they are fully relaxed, you are able to work more efficiently. Their jaws naturally loosen, they become cooperative, and quite pleasant to be around. In the end, you get better results and a happier patient.

#### 5) What are some common side effects of sedative medications?

- **Retrograde Amnesia**—Due to the amnesic effects of many of the medications, patients often remember little-to-nothing of their time in the dental chair by the next day.
- **Less Post-Operative Soreness**—When patients are afraid, their threshold for pain is much lower. Fear and anxiety trigger the release of certain chemicals in the brain, like adrenaline, which put a patient's "fight or flight" instincts on high alert. They anticipate that something is going to hurt and so they tense their muscles, even if it is subconsciously, leading to additional soreness post-treatment. With sedation, a patient's apprehension and hypersensitivity to pain is virtually eliminated, thus reducing the likelihood and severity of post-operative discomfort.
- **Dry Mouth**—The sedatives administered during a sedation appointment decrease salivary flow and allow the dentist to perform treatment in a dryer environment.

#### 6) I already give my patients 5 mg of Valium®—what's so different about this?

Every state has different oral sedation dentistry regulations. Some states now require a permit even for nitrous oxide administration and/or anxiolysis, so it's important to know your state dental board's rules. One of most helpful benefits of being a DOCS Education member is unlimited access to DOCS' full-time regulatory attorney and Membership Services Advisors. They can provide you with all of the information on your state's regulations, how to understand them, and what you need to do in order to meet them.

If you've given your patients Valium® in the past for anxiolytic purposes, then you are already aware of some of the potential benefits of sedation. However, there is more to sedation dentistry than just Valium®. Countless years of research have been dedicated to studying and finding methods and new medications to alleviate pain and anxiety since Valium's® arrival on the market in 1960's. Additionally, there are many other components of sedation dentistry that are important to learn, including proper patient monitoring, benzodiazepine reversal agents, patient health history intakes, and drug-drug interaction/contraindication screening. Learning to provide optimum sedation through DOCS' safe and predictable sedation protocols enables you to provide higher quality care to your patients.

Attending a DOCS course will help provide you with a broader understanding of adult oral conscious sedation along with proven systems to enhance a patients level of safety and produce consistent results.

## **7) What about drug interactions?**

Sedation medications are chosen based on an individual's medical history. At DOCS' courses you learn how to utilize sophisticated, yet easy-to-use dental-specific drug interaction software that automatically cross-checks a patient's medications (even herbal and nutritional supplements) with sedative medications. In addition to taking a thorough medical history from each patient, drug interaction screening and patient monitoring (with equipment such as a pulse oximeter with a blood pressure monitor), helps ensure oral sedation dentistry is completed safely and effectively.

## **8) I'm already seeing too many patients a day. Won't this only increase if I begin to offer sedation?**

As you become more comfortable with sedation dentistry, you will be able to schedule fewer—yet more productive—appointments. This is because sedation patients often require more treatment during a single visit. Many DOCS members whose days were filled with too many short, low-value appointments are able to create schedules that allow them to see a smaller number of patients while still increasing practice profitability. This is usually accomplished by setting aside one day every week solely for sedation treatments. Dr. Anthony S. Feck, Dean of DOCS faculty, has written several articles on the subject matter illustrating his personal keys to success.

## **9) What is the difference between anxiolysis and conscious sedation?**

There are typically dosing limitations involved with anxiolysis, usually a single dose the day of treatment not to exceed the maximum recommended dose (MRD) of the medication (to achieve the intended level of sedation). However, this can vary from state to state. Anxiolysis protocols are designed to treat healthy ASA I & II patients ages 18+ for 1-4 hours of treatment. Conscious sedation protocols allow more flexibility in dosing and often allow a doctor to administer incremental or supplemental doses to maintain a consistent level of sedation for longer periods of time.

## **10) Why should I bring my team? Do they need to be certified?**

A few states require some team certification, such as Missouri and West Virginia. **The more appropriate question is how much training does your team need to be effective and efficient?**

With sedation, your team has added roles and responsibilities, including being the first point of contact with fearful patients. Your front office staff needs to be able to explain how the entire process works to each patient. They are also responsible for patient admittance and dismissal, including sedation-specific forms and documentation. It's critical for clinical team to understand how to appropriately monitor patients' vital signs using equipment like a pulse oximeter with a blood pressure monitor, and how to recognize potential emergencies before they become an actual emergency. DOCS recommends that each doctor bring at least one team member. If you are unable to bring a team member, resources like the Team Training DVD and Oral Sedation Dentistry Guidebook can help you prepare your team when you return from the course.