

Teeth

[The Modern Dentist: Today's fun trends and relaxing help](#)

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Top-5 Trends at the Dentist

Why you shouldn't be scared any more!

You're in a dentist's office.

Wait! Don't panic.

Take a big whiff. What do you smell? Is that ... lavender?

If thinking about the dentist conjures up images of painful drills, stinky clinical rooms, and incessant grinding and squealing noises, boy, are you out of the loop! Pull up your massage chair and turn on your iPod. It's time for a lesson in modern dentistry.

Today's dentist is all about comfort, friendliness and all-encompassing services. [We asked 18 dentists what trends you should know about.](#) Here's the rundown on what you can look for to make your next dental visit a walk in the—spa!

Dental Trend #1: PAINLESS DENTISTRY

Painless dentistry has been around for years. What's different today are the more effective methods. [There are topical anesthetics that numb you before the injection, says Dr. Barr.](#)

Haven't had a cleaning for a while? Get your gums numbed with gel, says Dr. Gross. And some dentists use high-speed cleaners "that go so fast they have almost no vibration, which means very little pain," says Dr. Daniel Smith.

Injected anesthesia is also different these days. **Rarely do you leave with half your jaw and tongue numb.** "We can simply numb a single tooth," Dr. Kosinski says. Dr. Tiu likes a technique called slow-injection anesthesia that's less painful.

And then there's laser dentistry. "Most patients can have fillings done without anesthesia, utilizing a laser that has no vibration and no cold water running in the mouth," says Dr. Daniel Smith.

The key is to find out whether your dentist practices methods like these. "Unfortunately, many of these techniques are not successfully taught at dental schools," Dr. Goldberg says. Dentists often have to learn about them on their own.

Dr. Tiu suggests just asking the office. "If the staff or other people you talk to are raving about a dentist, chances are he or she is pretty good at delivering painless dentistry."

Dental Trend #2: ENTERTAINING DISTRACTIONS

You've seen televisions in dentists' offices for years. But today, you



might get your own personal headphones to go with your own personal screen. **"Soft music, video games, wireless Internet and television are just a few examples of the tools that we have at our disposal to create a positive dental experience,"** says Dr. Gross. Some offices even loan you an iPod.

"Keeping your mind busy with alternative thoughts will make the visit quicker and less emotionally painful," says Dr. Daniel Smith.

Dental Trend #3: SPA PAMPERING

Teeth cleaning and pampering? Together? Whoda thunk it? "To enhance the dental experience, **some offices are offering spa treatments in conjunction with dental services,**" says Dr. Tiu. "Have fillings or a dental cleaning done while you get a pedicure or foot rub, or how about a hot towel and aromatherapy while you wait for the doctor?"

Dr. Feltoon's office, for example, offers a massage chair, heated



herbal neck wraps and paraffin hand treatments—for free. All this is just another way to enhance your relaxation, says Dr. Tiu. But, he notes, some clinics may charge extra. And chances are your insurance doesn't cover pedicures.

Dental Trend #4: SPEED DENTISTRY

“It used to take several visits to accomplish what can now be done in a day,” says Dr. Goldberg. For example, crowns.

“People may remember crowns or veneers being multiple-visit procedures,” Dr. Tiu says. They'd take an impression on the first visit, you'd wear temporary teeth for a few weeks, and then you'd go back for your permanent crowns.

Now, it just takes one trip. “The



teeth are prepared and scanned into a computer, the crown or veneer is designed on the computer and fabricated on a special milling unit—all in less than 20 minutes.” You can only get single teeth with this procedure, though—no bridges.

Even the dreaded root canal has changed. It “used to be a slow, tedious procedure, often consuming several long appointments,” says Dr. Colin. Now, “the time it takes to do a root canal is a fraction of the previous time, and the end result is more accurate and better quality.”

Implants and braces can also be quicker today.

Dental Trend #5: MOBILE DENTISTRY

In some places, dentists on wheels can come see you. Traditionally, this practice has been for rural areas “where it is not financially worthwhile for a dentist to set up a fixed-location practice,” explains Dr. Shannon.

This may be a growing trend as boomers age and mobile dentistry reaches out to the home-bound. **Dr. Goldberg believes “it is much needed and relatively unavailable.”**

But Dr. Shannon warns that if your child sees a mobile



dentistry service at school, cavities may not be taken care of. He’s seen businesses come in to schools to provide only preventive services. “If one of their patients needs a filling, for instance, the patient is told to find a local, community-based dentist for treatment of the cavity.”

Dr. Shannon doesn’t appreciate businesses like these, anyway, in part because they can be based out of state, he says, and “undermine the dental practices which are already in the community and have invested their livelihoods in that community.”

Final Thoughts

If all these trends make you feel overwhelmed rather than soothed, take heart. “At the end of the day,” says Dr. Austin, “it’s all about finding a dentist that makes you feel comfortable, who you can talk to, who listens and explains all procedures thoroughly, has a clean and comfortable office, who is well trained, and cares about their patients.”

“Having a television in the office or exam room does not mean you’ll receive quality care,” notes Dr. Helaine Smith. Touché, Dr. Smith. Touché.



Warning!

There are good dental trends and bad ones. These are a few our dentists warned against.

Television dental makeovers: Sure, those folks get gorgeous teeth, but they may not last. From the looks of them, many makeover participants have gum disease and should have had weeks to months of treatment before crowns or veneers, says Dr. Evans. “Without healthy gums and supporting bone, the fancy, expensive cosmetic dentistry is doomed to fail prematurely.”

Even with a healthy mouth, crowns and veneers might only last about 10 years, he says. “Young patients in their 20s or 30s may require three or four replacements in their lifetimes, at a staggering expense.”

Unnecessary procedures: In order to be an in-network provider, dentists must discount their services for insurance companies. Dr. Shannon believes this revenue loss has various consequences, including potentially on treatment. “Regrettably, such financial pressures on the contracted provider can, and often do, cloud the doctor’s professional judgment so that he diagnoses and treats conditions that either do not exist, are not necessary, or do not require such expensive remedies.”

Bad bleaching: Bleaching usually looks great, says Dr. Guest, but can occasionally “be overdone to the point of looking unnatural and making the teeth sensitive.” For any procedure, Dr. Feltoon recommends asking for photos of previous patients.

Dr. Helaine Smith warns against bleaching at malls and gyms. “The technicians who perform the procedure are not dentists—or even medical experts.” She believes this can pose problems. Nondentists may not recognize that your teeth shouldn’t be bleached because you have crowns or veneers or because “your teeth have been discolored due to illness in childhood or even too much fluoride.” (She suggests microabrasion for some types of stains instead.) “In addition, many dentists recommend that pregnant and lactating women hold off on teeth whitening until a later date—again, something a tech may not know.”

Cheap crowns: “Some dentists are sending their crowns to China for fabrication,” says Dr. Kosinski. “As you may have seen in the media, these crowns are sometimes poorly made and regulated, with lead ending up in the crowns. The public needs to be made aware that a cheap crown is just that, cheap.”

Dentist Who's Who

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