

The Dental *Examiner*

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2014 Illinois State Dental Society Mission of Mercy—Peoria, Illinois

By: Eric G. Jackson, DDS, MAGD, FICOI, FICD, FADI



I'm proud to report that on June 21st I took part in the Illinois Dental Society's 3rd Mission of Mercy (MOM) event in Peoria, Illinois. This fantastic event is held every two years in a different Illinois location and is one of my favorite opportunities to volunteer my dental skills. Some of you may remember the 2nd Quarter 2012 OHCP Newsletter (all past newsletter issues are available on our website by the way) when Tam-mie, Jenny and I volunteered at 2012 MOM held at the Lake Country fairgrounds in Grayslake, IL. Well, I'm proud to say the 2014 MOM was even bigger and better!!! With military precision that would make Haw-keye, Trapper John, and even the Colonel proud, the ISDS crew executed a "M*A*S*H" style event that produced over ONE MILLION DOLLARS of dental services COMPLETELY FREE to those who attended. Prospective patients were sleeping under the stars outside the



Peoria Civic Center a day before the event to make sure they had a place in line when the drills started whirring at 6:30am on both Friday and Saturday. The event is really just a humongous “popup” modern dental office! Each day, patients would start by filling out registration/medical history paperwork and then be transferred to different dental teams by a great group of volunteer “runners.” Next stop after registration was Triage where patients received an exam, diagnosis, and their proposed treatment recommendations from the triage team of dentists. Quite a few dental services are offered at each MOM including hygiene, fillings, root canals, extractions (both regular and wisdom teeth), and even limited laboratory services such as denture repair and partial denture fabrication. With treatment plan in hand, the patients were then transferred to the anesthesia team (my team this year) where we would numb the appropriate areas. Once numb, the patients were trans-

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Ask a Dentist...

“I hate getting my teeth cleaned or having dental work because I have such a terrible gag reflex. Is there anything that can help?”

By: Eric G. Jackson, DDS, MAGD, FICOI, FICD, FADI

A strong involuntary gag reflex and dentistry aren't typically good bedfellows. For patients with this condition, nearly everything about dentistry is more difficult. From taking x-rays, to restorative work like fillings and crowns, to having their teeth cleaned, a strong gag reflex can present a significant obstacle to both patient and dentist in the office. Even the normally straightforward task of brushing their teeth at home can be difficult. Because of all these difficulties, patients with strong gag reflexes often require both larger and comparatively more dental work than their non-gagging counterparts. This is especially true with molars and other posterior teeth. Perhaps this scenario sounds familiar to some of you?...well have faith! Over the course of this article, I will guide you to a better understanding of the condition as well as share some of my most effective techniques that have allowed completion of great dental work on heavy gaggers over my career. These techniques create a much more tolerable, if not enjoyable, experience for the patient...and the dentist!

The pharyngeal reflex or gag reflex (also known as a laryngeal spasm) is a reflex contraction often evoked by touching the roof of the mouth, the back of the tongue, the area around the tonsils, or the back of the throat. It is intended to prevent something from entering the throat except as part of normal swallowing and therefore helps prevent choking. A gag reflex is a good safety mechanism for those with “average” reflexes, but what about people on the extreme ends? Did you know that slightly over one third of healthy adults don’t even have a gag reflex? These people typically have no

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problem with dental work so let's focus on the other extreme, those with a severe gag reflex. There are MANY different techniques that both the dentist and the patient can utilize to combat a severe gag reflex. We'll cover some of my favorites in this article. Remember, not every technique yields the same results for each patient, so it's important to try as many as possible and see which works best. Let's begin...

OK, here you go...I've decided to start the discussion with my best gold nugget technique that has far and away helped me render comfortable treatment on severe gaggers throughout my career. Ready...? Numb the soft palate (and everything else in the back of the mouth/throat area while you're there)! When an object touches the soft palate (i.e. your throat), it can easily trigger the gag reflex. Think swab throat culture taken by the nurse at your MD's office when you suspect Strep throat. Not fun for most, and nearly impossible for some. Unlike the throat culture, dental work is not typically completed in a few seconds and rarely involves the soft palate. The long duration of many dental procedures, combined with lying on your back, combined with a dental provider placing instruments near the soft palate, is more than enough to cause repeated gagging in many patients. This is why I numb not only the soft palate but surrounding tissue as well. This can be accomplished by using either a topical gel or topical spray, typically composed of 20% Benzocaine. While both can be effective, I vastly prefer the spray because it covers more area with less product. Simply spray the entire rear of the mouth, have the patient hold it for a few moments, and then swallow. Duration of numbness varies from patient to patient but easily lasts 15-30 minutes with the spray that I use. Repeat as needed throughout the appointment and before you know it, the procedure is finished with everyone smiling!

Another technique is to have the patient relax. Easier said than done...it IS a dental appointment right! The gag reflex cannot only be triggered by physiology, but psychology as well, and for some patients the latter plays the dominant role! The psychological dissection of a dental appointment is incredibly complex and beyond the focus of this article, but we'll cover the highpoints. Since dental anxiety can heighten the gag reflex, it needs to be controlled. Perhaps the patient had a traumatic dental experience in the past or perhaps they have an unspoken fear of losing control. These are both quite common sources of dental anxiety and the first step to reversing them is open and honest communication between dentists and patient. It is extremely important to me to have the patient in control of the appointment. For those of you who I've worked on, perhaps you remember me mentioning at the appointment to "raise your left hand if you need something." It doesn't matter to me why a patient raises their left hand because all reasons are valid! From needing a bathroom break to an overabundance of water in their mouth to sensing a cough or sneeze coming on, each of these pauses in the action helps me provide a more

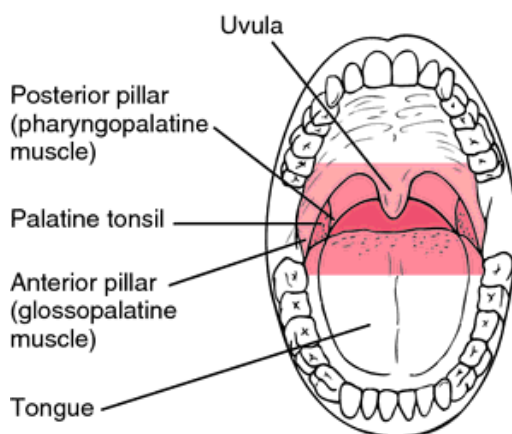
pleasant dental appointment. I strongly rely on patient feedback to inform me about how to deliver better care. Additional anti-anxiety methods are also quite effective. Nitrous oxide (laughing gas), working with the room lights off, dark sunglasses, an iPod with soothing music, and even hypnosis are all good techniques that calm a patient and thereby diminish the likelihood of a gag reflex during the appointment.

Did you know that a gag reflex can be un-learned? If a patient with a severe gag reflex is able to gradually get their soft palate accustomed to being touched, their gag reflex can be minimized, or possibly eliminated. This is the same method used by sword swallows in the circus. While it does require practice and effort over time, it is an actual long-term solution to the condition. "Curing" oneself of a severe gag reflex will dramatically make your trips to the dental office easier as well as your daily oral hygiene routine! The following is from a website that I feel summarized the desensitization technique quite well:

- Find out where your gag reflex starts. This can be done by simply using your toothbrush to brush your tongue. The point nearest the front of your tongue that makes you gag is where you want to concentrate.
- Brush your tongue right where your gag begins. Yes, you'll gag, and it will be unpleasant—but not for long. Spend about ten seconds brushing that area (and gagging), and then call it a night.
- Repeat the process over the next few nights in the exact same spot. You'll notice you gag less each time you do it.
- Increase the brushing area. Once you can touch your toothbrush on that spot without gagging, it's time to move the toothbrush further back. Try brushing $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (6mm–12mm) behind where your gag used to begin. This is your new starting point. Repeat the process as you did in the first spot.
- Continue moving the brush farther back. Each time you move the toothbrush back, your gag has been desensitized in the previous spot. Keep moving it farther and farther back until you've reached the farthest visual point of your tongue. Eventually, the toothbrush will come in contact with the soft palate, if it hasn't already. Be persistent. This whole process should take approximately a month to complete. When the process is complete, you should be able to have a doctor swab the back of your throat without gagging. You might have to redo the process from time to time, as your reflex may return if you don't. A good way to keep yourself desensitized is to brush your tongue regularly. Not only will it help quell the gag reflex, it will also give you fresher breath!

I'd like to mention three final techniques are simple, straightforward, and quite effective. #1: "Breathe through your nose" is a great rule of thumb to abide by when in the dental chair. With all the water spray, the instruments, and the hands of the provider(s), it makes sense not to complicate the

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On June 22, our office was a proud sponsor of the 37th annual Downers Grove 5 Miler race! Dr. Eric and Maria attended the event and hob knobbed with all the runners...many of which were our patients! Kudos to everyone for not only maintaining good oral health but good overall physical health as well! We even held a contest for a deluxe Sonicare DiamondClean toothbrush! We love supporting our local community and are proud to have sponsored such a great event. Go Downers Grove!



situation by breathing through your mouth. That is when gagging, and possibly choking, occurs. Be sure your nasal passages are clear and take a decongestant beforehand if needed. Taking a simple over-the-counter Sudafed or Claritin-D one hour prior to an appointment can make a world of difference! #2: Schedule your appointment appropriately! Some people report they gag easier in the morning or during the day. If this is true, be sure to schedule in the afternoon or during one of my evening appointments. #3: Do something with your body during the appointment to take your mind off gagging. Holding a squishy stress ball in each hand and alternating squeezes during the appointment is a great technique! Another great option is to squeeze your left (or right) thumb if you feel a gag coming on. Some patients like lifting both their ankles slightly off the dental chair and holding them for awhile before relaxing. While effective, I always mention a word of caution when I discuss the ankle technique: be sure to keep both your head AND the dental chair still. Removing/minimizing the gag reflex is good but not at the expense of turning in to a moving target for your dental provider! Keep your motions subtle and small. For this reason, I prefer the squish ball or thumb squeeze techniques.

Having a strong gag reflex and being unprepared can be a nightmare at the dental office. I hope that by utilizing the techniques and information from this article you can minimize, or possibly eliminate your severe reflex and have a much more enjoyable dental experience. As always, if you have any questions, or would like to speak further about this topic, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely, Dr. Jackson

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharyngeal_reflex
ⁱⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharyngeal_reflex
ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.wikihow.com/Suppress-the-Gag-Reflex>
^{iv} <http://www.dentalcarecentral.org/fears/gagging/>

Flissword Answers: Across: 2. Key, 3. Thomas, 4. England, 5. Million, 8. France, 11. Liberty, 13. Parade, & 14. Calvin
 Down: 1. Declaration, 6. Britain, 7. July, 9. Edward, 10. Greece, 12. Party



(2014 ISDS MOM Continued)



Our Dr. Eric Jackson & Dr. Rick Stiles



2014 MOM Anesthesia Team Work Stations

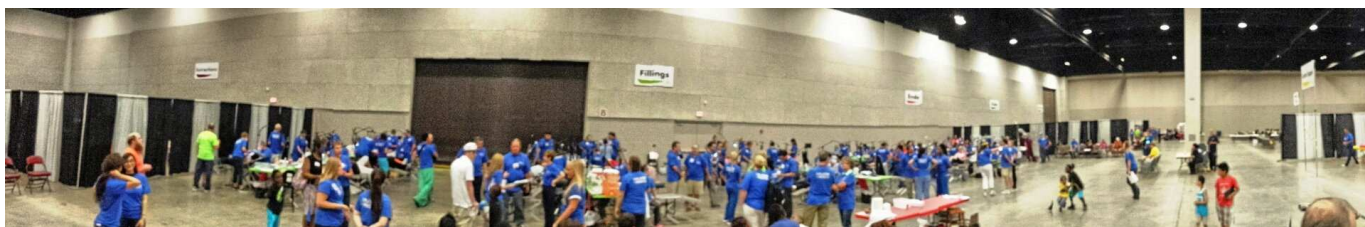
Dr. Eric treating patients while rockin' the pink gloves!

ferred for fillings, oral surgery, or root canals. All this was done with the help of a massive sterilization and restocking team keeping all instruments sterile and necessary accessories like gloves, masks, and disinfectant wipes in steady supply. It went off without a hitch and was quite an organizational feat to behold!!! To give you an idea of the magnitude of this two-day event, here are some event statistics:

Statistics for the 2014 Mission of Mercy

1,000 Volunteers
1,951 Patient visits
\$1,072,190.10 in treatment performed
1,990 extracted teeth
1,265 fillings
765 hygiene visits
135 partial dentures
377 x-rays
61 root canals

I am proud to actively participate in numerous volunteer events/organizations that assist those in need on a local, regional, and statewide level. The ISDS MOM is certainly the grandest of them all. My hat goes off to all those involved with this great event: the ISDS planning committee, the volunteers (dentists, hygienists, assistants, staff, and fantastic non-dental trained runners), and the corporate donors of TONS of cutting-edge dental materials and dental equipment, but most of all my hat goes off to the patients. Such a grateful group of people. Hugs, handshakes, and dozens of "God bless you doctor" from thankful patients throughout the event. Frankly, it reminds me of the great group of patients that I am fortunate to serve right here in Downers Grove. That is why I volunteer, that is why I support organized dental groups like the Illinois State Dental Society, and that is what makes me love this profession so much. Simply put, THAT is why I'm a dentist. My dental "soul" is certainly refueled beyond capacity at each MOM and I'm proud to have been a tiny part in this big event.



From the Manager's Desk...

The New Patient Communication System

By: Tammie P. MacMullen, BSB, MHA

Communication is the key to giving patients the best care possible. Earlier this June, our practice rolled out a new patient communication system that allows for improved communications with our patients. Here are a few highlights from the new communication system I would like to share with you:



Appointment Reminders

Automated messaging utilizing text, e-mail, and phone call technology to confirm appointments and remind patients of their appointments. We can customize each patients' preferences for reminders. Ask one of our Patient Coordinators for more details and take advantage of the personal customization.



E-Newsletters

Newsletters sent via e-mail to keep our patients up to date on important health topics.



Recare Reminders

Automated messages sent to remind patients when they are overdue for their 6 month appointment with the hygienist. With the simple click of a button, patients can request for one of our Patient Coordinators to contact them to schedule an appointment.



E-Surveys

The day after an appointment, patients will receive an E-Survey from our office asking them for their opinion on their visit the previous day. We want to make sure we exceed each patient's expectations each visit and how we can improve for their next visit.



ASAP Messaging

When we have a last minute cancelation, our ASAP messages are immediately sent out to patients to help those that have a busy schedule and cannot schedule in advance



Referrals

Patient can now participate in our Referral Program with the click of a button and start earning Referral Thank You Rewards.



Requesting Appointments Online

Patients can now request appointments online from our website.

Coming in the near future:



Patient Portal

Patients can easily log in and handle healthcare related issues 24 hours a day. Patients can pay their bills, exchange secure messages, customize their personal preferences, access secure documents, or even read archived newsletters.

Remember, everything is customizable to fit each and every patient's needs and wants when it comes to communicating with our practice. Have questions, please give the office a call to speak with one of our Patient Coordinators. And remember keep your contact information up to date with our office to continue to enjoy these new fantastic features available to you.

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information about our services.

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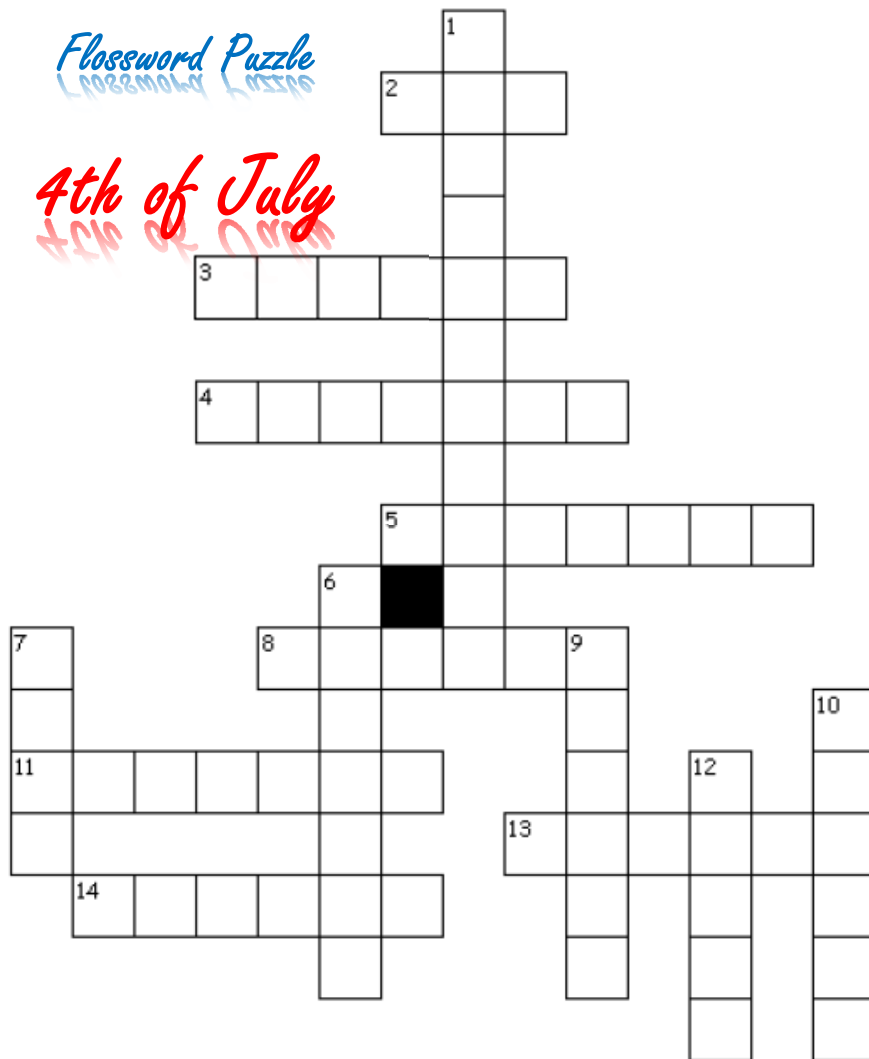
New Bites with Laura

As you are enjoying your summer vacation, please consider any family members who might be due to visit our hygienists before heading back to school. We will be happy to make an appointment.

And remember to get your school forms completed as well!

Flossword Puzzle

4th of July



Across

2. The "Star Spangled Banner" was written by Francis Scott ____ during the War of 1812 and not decreed the official national anthem of the United States until 1931.
3. The Declaration of Independence was penned by ____ Jefferson and signed by 56 men representing 13 colonies.
4. The Liberty Bell was cast in ____.
5. In July 1776, the estimated number of people living in the newly independent nation was 2.5 _____. The estimated population in July 2013 was 316.2 million.
8. The Statue of Liberty was made in ____.
11. Iowa has more places with "_____" in its name than any other state.
13. The oldest, continuous Independence Day celebration in the United States is the 4th of July _____ in Bristol, Rhode Island, it began in 1785.
14. President _____ Coolidge was born on July 4, 1872.

Down

1. The Pennsylvania Evening Post was the first newspaper to print the _____ of Independence.
6. Eight of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence were born in _____.
7. John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Moore died on ____ 4.
9. The average age of the signer of the Declaration of Independence was 45. Benjamin Franklin was the oldest at age 70 and _____ Rutledge was the youngest at age 26.
10. France, _____, Poland, Russia and several countries in South America used the Declaration of Independence as a beacon in their own struggles for freedom.
12. The White House held its first 4th of July _____ in 1801.

Answers found on the bottom of page 3