



Dental Sedation and Patient Safety

The effective control of anxiety and pain has been an integral part of dental practice since the early development of the profession. In fact, the introduction of anesthesia and anesthetic agents to dull or eliminate the physical and psychological effects of pain may be considered one of dentistry's greatest contributions to humankind.

The use of effective sedative and anesthetic techniques has enabled millions of people, including young children and physically and mentally challenged patients, to safely undergo dental treatments they might otherwise be unable to receive. Dentistry has been at the forefront of ensuring patient safety with regard to sedation and anesthesia, and statistics show that dental anesthesia is very safe. The American Dental Association and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry have developed guidelines for sedation education, training and use, and the California Dental Association has been integrally involved in the development of anesthesiology standards and statutes in California. In California, dentists must receive additional education and obtain appropriate licensing for some types of sedation and general anesthesia.

Despite that excellent safety record, CDA advises patients, or their parents, to become fully informed about a pending dental procedure to ensure a positive experience for themselves or a child. Among the questions they should ask are:

- Does the dentist follow the sedation guidelines issued by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry or the American Dental Association?
- What procedures are in place if a patient has an adverse reaction to sedation?
- How will the patient be monitored during and after the procedure?
- Is the dentist fully licensed for the use of sedation or general anesthesia?
- What is the dentist's experience level in performing such procedures?

It is important that patients be fully informed and have trust in their dentist. If patients are not satisfied with their dentist's answers to these or other questions, they should consult with another dentist. There are many dentists fully trained and qualified in the use of sedation and anesthesia, and CDA can help patients find one in their area.